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The Star

Jordan's political, economic and cultural weekly

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اسبوعية سياسية مستقلة

Le Jourdain

Supplément en français au Star

Une eau de plus en plus rare malgré un hiver pluvieux

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Beauty of Kashmir

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French theater in earnest

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Dakamseh's lawyer says client's testimony will help his case

AMMAN (Star)—The issue of the Jordanian soldier who is accused of killing seven Israeli school girls in Baqoura on 13 March continues to occupy the minds of the Jordanian people.

Sympathy continues to be displayed by many Jordanians and activists from Arab countries for Corp. Ahmed Dakamseh, who is still being investigated and has not yet been charged.

Calls for a just and fair trial for Dakamseh are still being made in the Jordanian media, especially after recent revelations that he was provoked. Others tied his action to Israeli policies and actions especially in Jerusalem.

Ahmed Mousa Dakamseh, 26, father of three, has been held in custody since the attack. He is being interrogated by a military committee, that is expected to conclude it investigations by 20 April.

"He was in his full military uniform and clean shaven when I met him as if he is on duty," said his lawyer Ahmad Al Najdawi, who was authorized by the general attorney to defend Dakamseh. "His spirits were high, confident. He was not subjected to torture or pressure as he confirmed to me." Al Najdawi told *The Star*, describing Dakamseh during their first meeting on 23 March.

Al Najdawi, who reviewed the investigation report, said "Dakamseh opened fire out of a sense of national duty and to protect his military honor." The soldier was in a rage at the time, "as

Continued on page2

Stronger US action needed to ward off 'approaching crisis,' King Hussein says

By Thomas W. Lippman and agencies reports

WASHINGTON—President Clinton said Tuesday he has "some ideas" about resuming peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, but His Majesty King Hussein said after meeting Clinton at the White House that stronger US action is needed to ward off an "approaching crisis."

But talks with King Hussein produced little in the way of movement or new ideas, according to US and Jordanian officials. The administration instead is throwing the ball back into the Israeli and Palestinian court.

President Clinton called on Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat Tuesday to declare "zero tolerance" for terrorism as a "precondition to going forward." The White House plans to press Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week on how far he is prepared to go if all parties agree to scrap the rest of the process outlined in what is known as the Oslo agreement and skip straight to so-called final status talks.

Clinton said he participated in two long meetings Monday and Tuesday to consider the report of Middle East troubleshooter Dennis Ross, whom he sent to see Israeli and Palestinian leaders last week.



King Hussein at the White House meeting with President Clinton

As a result, he said, "We have some ideas. We'll be discussing them. And perhaps together we can get this peace process back on track."

Neither Clinton nor King Hussein said what these "new ideas" were. According to senior administration officials, among the possible approaches are a declared "cooling-off period" in which a new round of negotiations could be discussed, and a possible US endorsement of a proposal by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to scrap interim arrangements now in place and go directly to "final status" negotiations with the Palestinians.

"The key is Bibi," said a senior US official, using Netanyahu's nickname. "We need to find out if he's really serious about accelerating the final status talks and whether he is really prepared to make the most critical decisions (in the peace process)."

The Israeli leader's proposal would abandon two more phases of the Israeli withdrawal from small amounts of territory in the West Bank and move directly to the most disputed issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the status of Jerusalem and sovereignty for the Palestinians.

King Hussein, who was briefed by Netanyahu last month, said that the Israeli prime minister thinks the Oslo agreement "creates certain difficulties" that present circumstances make harder rather than easier to solve.

"He thinks it might be a good idea to look at all issues

Continued on page 2

Netanyahu considers expanding cabinet to include Labor

By Nicholas Goldberg

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM—With the peace process sliding into crisis and criticism of the Israeli government resounding from capitals around the world, a beleaguered Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is considering forming a government of "national unity" with his longtime enemies in the Labor Party.

Under the scenario making the rounds here, Netanyahu would invite into his Cabinet former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, the septuagenarian Labor Party leader whom he bested in May's elections and with whom he has held several meetings to discuss the possibility of a merger.

Other leading Laborites, including Netanyahu's chief rival, former Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, also would be invited to join the government.

One purpose of the national unity government would be to free Netanyahu from the clutches of the right-wing coalition that got him elected but now is fighting him at each step as he seeks to move forward with the peace process.

With the backing of a new government forged from Labor and Netanyahu's Likud Party, the theory goes, Netanyahu would have the flexibility to work out a moderate, cautious, consensus approach to the peace process that would unite the country and

Continued on page 2

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Weather Outlook

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Aramaic—the language of Jesus—hangs on in modern world

By John Daniszewski

MALULA, Syria—On these holy days of Easter, retired school teacher George Rizkalla is on a lonely mission: to keep alive a language once spoken by Jesus.

A self-described "enthusiast" for his native Aramaic, he has written songs in it for public performances and drawn up glossaries of the language using both Latin and Arabic letters. He prods his neighbors in this mountain village to speak it whenever possible and teach it to the children, so they won't be swallowed up in the Arabic all around.

Still, Rizkalla hears the tongue of his forebears less and less as he trods the steep lanes of this mile-high community. He estimates that there are just 6000 people, in Malula and two nearby villages who still speak his branch of the Aramaic tongue. "Even my own children do not understand everything," he says sadly.

Aramaic—especially the western form spoken here in southern Syria, on the edges of the Holy Land—is hanging on by a thread in the modern world. Some linguists fear it may vanish in a generation or two unless steps are taken to preserve it. A handful of scholars are putting the language to paper and interviewing old people for arcane vocabulary. But most are convinced the living remnants of the tongue spoken throughout the Near East at the beginning of the Christian era is doomed.

"It may not be clay or marble, but it is a part of our heritage," says Rizkalla. "We should not let it die."

Experts marvel that Aramaic persists at all in the three isolated communities nestled in Syria's Kalamoun mountains, just 35 miles north of the capital, Damascus. They represent tiny islands in an ocean of Arabic. One professor said it was like discovering someone who could speak Ancient Egyptian alive today a few miles outside of Cairo.

Aramaic is one of the world's late great languages. It

Continued on page 2

World Report



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Karamah calls for liberation of Jerusalem

AMMAN (Star)—More than 2000 people took part in a festival in solidarity with the city of Jerusalem in Karamah in the Jordan Valley last Friday. The festival which was held at the Martyrs Square coincided with the 1968 Battle of Karamah and the Palestinian Land Day that was celebrated last Sunday.

The festival, which started after the Friday noon prayers lasted for up to two hours and included many politicians, trade unions, professional associations, women organizations and human rights' activists. They were from all walks of life—Islamists, nationalists, leftists and moderates. What was interesting about the festival is that people came by buses from all around the Kingdom, including Amman, Irbid, Karak and Zerqa.

With heavy police roadblocks, some buses were turned away. Most of the buses carrying activists from the Jordanian Women's Union were turned away by police. The buses first made their way to the King Hussein Bridge, but in the end they assembled in the Martyrs Square in Al Karamah before the noon prayers.

The festival started in earnest after prayers with little interference from the police authorities.

Many spoke at the festival. They include Sulieman Arar, the general secretary of the Al Mustaqbal Party who spoke on behalf of Arab parties, Jamil Abu Baker, the Islamic Brotherhood spokesman, Emile Nafah, the head of the Arab Women Association, Tayseer Himsi of the Jordanian Arab Baath Socialist Party, Saeed Theyab of the Popular Unity Party, and Hussein Mjalli, general secretary of the Jordan Lawyers Association who spoke on behalf of the Professional Associations. Dr Faris Al Fayez spokes on Behalf of the Jordanian Badia.



The protesters were very angry especially with what is happening on the West Bank and Israeli intransigence in building a settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim. Speakers see this as an Israeli attempt to Judize the city. In a fervent mood they called on all Arab for the liberation of Jerusalem.

In this respect they also condemned the latest American vetoes in the United Nations. They saw this as proof that the United States is not a true mediator in the peace process. They said that peace would continue to be a "big lie" and the Americans continue to "humiliate the Arabs.

They pointed out that Jordan must withdraw its ambassador in Tel Aviv, and expel the Israeli ambassador in Amman. Since then, security around the Israeli embassy and the ambassador's residency has been stepped up. It was reported last Monday, that the ambassador's car windows were smashed right outside his residence. ■



His Majesty King Hussein holds up an autographed major league baseball that was given to him while attending the 5th Anniversary Seeds of Peace Dinner, 31 March, at the Rainbow Room in New York City. The event honored King Hussein with the Ruth Ratner Miller 1997 Seeds of Peace Prize. (UPI photo)

Aramaic—the language of Jesus—hangs on in modern world

Continued from page 1

belongs to the Afroasiatic, or Hamito-Semitic, family, and is a cousin to Hebrew and more distantly Arabic. Its name comes from Aram, an archaic word for Syria.

The language spread from Syria to much of the ancient world—from Pakistan to upper Egypt—in the first millennium B.C. Used by the Persian and Babylonian empires, especially from 700-200 B.C. it became a trans-national language of literature, politics and commerce, much as English is today.

What makes it of particular note to religious scholars is that Jews adopted Aramaic after being conquered by Babylon in the sixth century B.C. Therefore, the Books of Daniel and Ezra in the Bible were written in Aramaic, as was the major portion of the Talmud, the compilation of Jewish laws and traditions.

But is the language in Malula truly the language of Jesus? The evidence is circumstantial: Jesus, a resident of Galilee, less than 100 miles away, surely spoke the Aramaic of his day and Malula is the nearest Aramaic-speaking community to survive. (Other strongly differentiated dialects—also called modern Aramaic but by now no longer understandable to people in Malula—exist in parts of Turkey, Iran and Iraq.)

Despite Malula's proximity to the land of Jesus, scholars hesitate to assert a direct descent because they lack evidence and they caution that languages evolve so much that the talk of Malula would be incomprehensible to someone from Jesus's era. "If Jesus were to come back, he would not understand a word," says Alan S. Kaye, professor of linguistics at the California State University at Fullerton, a specialist in Near Eastern and Arabic languages.

But for Malula's overwhelmingly Christian population, a mix of Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics, the connection is an article of faith.

"When our master Jesus Christ first spoke, he spoke this language," Serki Daboul, a 72-year-old patriarch dressed in a headscarf, embroidered jacket and traditional baggy trousers, said firmly. "As long as we live, this language will, too."

The language, however, is only oral—residents must read and write in Arabic. Even church services are held in Greek and Arabic, although Rizkalla has put some hymns into modern Aramaic.

As for the rest of Syria and Palestine, Aramaic was swept aside when Islam burst upon the region in the seventh century A.D. The Muslim conquerors brought in Arabic, the language of Prophet Muhammad and the Quran.

Malula's location, on a steep slope pocked with caves more than 5000 feet about sea level, made it an ideal sanctuary for Christians who wanted neither the language nor the religion, and it managed to stay aloof for 1300 years.

"This area has few economic resources. So when invading armies came through, they usually just walked right by," says Timothy Heckenlively, a 26-year-old graduate student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, spending a year in Malula studying the language.

But that isolation is vanishing. Many residents now commute by a new highway to Damascus, finding work in the city's bakeries. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Stronger US action needed to ward off 'approaching crisis,' King Hussein says

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of the final status within a certain time span to be agreed, while Oslo remains a reference and a fallback position," the king told reporters after his White House talks.

Over the past month the once-promising relationship between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has dissolved into bitterness as Israel made a unilateral decision to begin construction of Jewish housing in Arab East Jerusalem and Palestinian extremist groups responded with new militant attacks.

The United States criticized the start of the housing project, which in the US and Arab view is aimed at preempting scheduled negotiations over the future of Jerusalem, but disappointed the Arabs by twice vetoing a UN Security Council resolution condemning it.

Before his 45-minute one-on-one meeting with King Hussein, Clinton said he wanted to discuss "How can we create a sense of both security and confidence in the Middle East. that is, that the Israelis will believe there is a commitment on the part of the Palestinians to security, and the Palestinians will have confidence that the Israelis will not attempt to prejudge the issues should be negotiated in good faith between them" such as the future of Jerusalem.

Asked if Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright should go to the region in an effort to salvage a negotiating process in which the United States and the Clinton administration in particular have made an enormous investment. Clinton responded, "I certainly want her to go. But I want her to be part of a clear strategy designed to move the process forward."

Senior officials said Albright believes the frequent trips to the Middle East of her predecessor, Warren Christopher, diminished their clout, and she wants to go only when there is a good chance her intervention would produce some breakthrough. In addition, the officials said, there is no need for Albright to go to the Middle East when all the region's leaders have been trooping through the White House.

White House press secretary Michael McCurry said Clinton and King Hussein met for 45 minutes with no one else in the room and decided not to reveal the details of their conversation.

The "ideas" Clinton talked about "were unspecified, both before and after the meeting," McCurry said. "I think you heard the president say this is a moment where we best conduct our diplomacy quietly."

He said Clinton "said that he's willing to take significant steps and willing to be personally involved. And he does not choose at this time to detail what shape that will take as we continue consultations with the parties and we continue a very active dialogue in the region and with the parties themselves."

King Hussein said afterward that he was "very encouraged" by his conversation with the president, but added that still greater effort is needed from Washington if peace negotiations are to resume and be productive.

"We need the United States to help us," he said in a meeting with reporters. "I am not suggesting pressure, but the efforts of friends commited to the same goal and the ability to persuade friends—those in positions of responsibility—that this is the time to move. So let's hope we'll see a more active policy by the United States."

King Hussein rejected the use of pressure on any party as a viable tactic because it no longer works. He called the non-binding decision made by Arab League foreign ministers Sunday to suspend normalization of ties with Israel as "a message of anger and despair" and a call for help, and said that he would not support it. ■

Netanyahu considers expanding cabinet to include Labor



Netanyahu



Peres

Continued from page 1

halt the crisis that is threatening to plunge the Middle East back into the cycle of violence.

"The truth is there isn't really that much of a difference between the Likud policy and the Labor policy on the final status talks with the Palestinians," said one senior aide to Netanyahu. "And when it came time to discuss those issues, a national unity government would have tremendous moral force."

Shared-power governments including the Likud Party on the right and Labor on the left are not unprecedented in Israel. In fact, between 1984 and 1988, Peres shared power with then-Likud leader Yitzhak Shamir.

But the merger is far from a done deal, and details are little more than educated speculation, according to government sources.

Before any such plan could be implemented, Netanyahu would have to undergo a stormy battle within his own party, jettisoning senior Cabinet ministers and other allies from the government. Peres, who is 73 and would like one final chance before retirement to push forward the peace process he helped create, would have to engage in a war of his own with Barak, who as Netanyahu's likely challenger in the year 2000 has far less incentive to join a coalition. Barak aides believe that Peres is trying to insinuate himself into a unity government as the most important Labor Party official in advance of party elections scheduled for 3 June.

Last week, Barak, who is a former army chief of staff, said he was not inclined to join Netanyahu's "government of failure, disgrace and stench." ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

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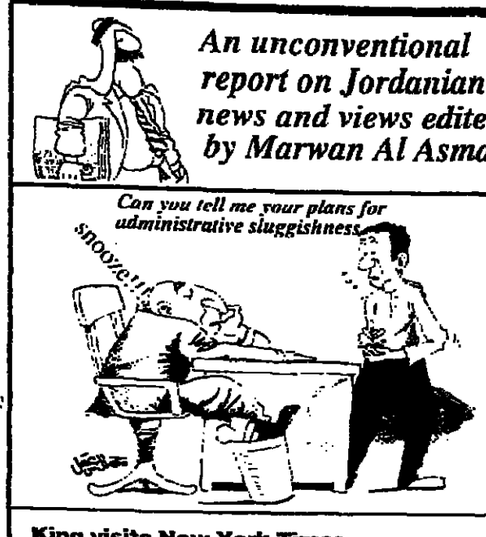
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JORDAN WEEK

An unconventional report on Jordanian news and views edited by Marwan Al Asmar



King visits New York Times

■ Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor paid a visit on Tuesday morning to the *New York Times* newspaper headquarters where they met with the administrative and editorial staff. During the meeting, the King reviewed the peace process since its begining and the achievements since the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement and the Oslo accord. His Majesty affirmed the authority of the Oslo agreement and the importance of implementing all the conditions agreed upon in preparation for the final status talks. The King also affirmed the importance of confidence building pointing to the importance of commitment by all parties to what has been agreed upon.

The King said that, through mutual confidence among parties, we were able to achieve a lot affirming at the same time the need to rush in regaining confidence among the concerned parties because the region can't take any more delay.

"The factor of time became urgent, all concerned parties and on top, the United States, must interfere to resume the peace process according to the Madrid and Oslo agreements." The King said that he will do his utmost to achieve progress so that Palestinians would regain their full rights on their national soil.

The meeting was attended by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, Chief of the Royal Court Awn Khasawneh, Rapporteur of the State Security Council Prince Talal and top Jordanian officials.

Changes at the top

■ Rumor has it that there is going to be quite a lot of changes at the Upper House of Parliament. For one thing, the current speaker of the Senate, Ahmed Al Lawzi is expected to resign because of health reasons. Veteran politician and several times prime minister, Mudar Badran is a strong contender for the post. Also, for a number of weeks now, the name of Zeid Al Rifai has been in the news. He is expected to take over from Awn Al Khasawneh as the next Chief of the Royal Court. It is said that Al Khasawneh's next assignment is as ambassador of Jordan in Washington. He takes over from Fayez Al Tarawneh, who is now a foreign minister in Al Majali's government. It was thought earlier that former Foreign Minister, Marwan Al Muasher would be the next man for the Washington job, but that was also based on rumors.

A constitutional rumble!

■ The recent resignation of Deputy Prime Minister for Services Abdallah Nsour from the Lower House is creating a bit of a constitutional rumble! Dr Nsour has submitted a letter to Lower House Speaker Said Hayel Al Sroor expressing his wish to resign. Parliamentary sources are saying however, that this is not as easy as it sounds. Nsour has to first submit his resignation to the Lower House which it will discuss. It is argued that it is then the House's prerogative whether or not to accept the resignation. In Nsour's case, the problem is that the Lower House is no longer in session and an extra-ordinary session is not likely to be held before the next elections. So it seems that Nsour will continue to be forced to act as deputy, that is at least till the next elections. The directives of this government that a minister should not be a deputy is understandable, but surely, Dr Nsour must realize that he has an obligation to his constituents who elected him in the first place. Just hang on a bit longer Dr Nsour!



Nsour

Thumps up for Majali

■ The government of Abdel Salam Al Majali has received the thumps up according to a latest opinion poll conducted by the Center of Strategic Studies in the University of Jordan. About 54 percent of those polled expect Dr Majali to "to fully succeed" succeed in the conduct of government business. The figure goes down to 48.5 percent among what is called as "opinion leaders". These include political analysts, party leaders professional association members, journalists and writers.

A storm in a tea cup

■ Parents in Mafraq were up in arms in the beginning of the week. They were refusing to send their children to school because of what they fear as falling standards in education. The row started when the Ministry of Education in Amman decided to put the schools under the jurisdiction of the Education Directorate in the Northern Tribal District. Ministry sources in Amman say the move is purely for administrative reasons, but it appeared that this was not good enough for the parents who demanded an education directorate of their own in Mafraq. At least 77 schools have been rendered ineffective simply because no pupils turned. However, ministry sources later argued that the problem was solved and the children are now attending schools normally.

Committee on Jerusalem meets at ACI

■ Mr Abdel Majeed Shoman, the head of the organizing committee for the National Dialogue for Jerusalem, said the meeting for the dialogue is taking place in the Amman Chamber of Industry (ACI) at 8.30 am on Saturday, 5 April. The official part of the dialogue, which was to be under the patronage of His Majesty King Hussein and attended by Palestinian president Yasser Arafat, had to be cancelled because the King is out of the country.



● *Nancy Bakir is the new secretary general of the Higher Council for Science and Technology. She takes over from Hani Al Mulki who was appointed Ministers of Trade and Industry and Supply. Bakir is the first woman in Jordan to occupy such a scientific position. Born in 1952, she has an MA in Adminstrative Development and Education from a university in the United States in 1984.*



His Majesty King Hussein with Secretary-General of the United Nations Koffi Annan, Monday. The meeting which lasted for 45 minutes centered on the Middle East process, continued Jordanian participation in the UN peace-keeping operations and the situation in Iraq. He told Mr Annan that there was an urgent need to lift the sufferings on the Iraqi people and called for the implementation of UN Security Council resolution no. 968, the oil for food formula. After that, the Secretary-General held a luncheon reception in honor of King Hussein. The King emphasized that Jordan is committed to the principles of a just and equal peace that takes its point of reference UN Security Council resolutions no 242 and 338.

Peace must satisfy aspirations of Palestinian, British ambassador says

By Hamdan Al Hajj
Special to The Star

BRITISH AMBASSADOR in Amman Mr Peter Hinchcliffe says the relations between Jordan and Britain is excellent. Speaking to *The Star* at the end of his tenure, Mr Hinchcliffe says that although the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty is extremely important, however he added that movement on the Palestinian-Israeli track was essential "because the core of the peace process remains between Palestinians and Israel."

The ambassador added that "peace will be mainly a true peace when the majority of the Palestinian aspirations are fulfilled," adding that if we talk about peace that doesn't satisfy the majority of Palestinians then it is not peace."

He added that since he was appointed as ambassador in 1993, the peace process had its "ups and down" pointing out that "the present situation of peace looks bad it will be overcome."

Mr Hinchcliffe said that the British government stressed to the Israeli government the importance of understanding the Palestinian worry particularly their concerns on settlements "which we regard as illegal and it was quite clear that the Oslo agreement put a freeze on settlements whether it is in east Jerusalem or elsewhere in West Bank and Gaza Strip."

"We urged Israelis to think again on settlements," because of it's sensitivity and which Palestinians regard "as provocative" and because of that "we see [it as creating] disorder in the West Bank and the tragic deaths of Palestinians."

The British ambassador said "it is important to get the two leaders of both sides to sit and talk and get to understand the sensitivities of each other," adding that "the Israelis are asked to show goodwill to the Palestinians."

Mr Hinchcliffe stated that "I think that the Americans are back, they are the host of the peace process and without them the peace process will not work." He said that although the recent American vetoes complicated the situation, the Europeans don't want to "complicate nor contradict with the American efforts."

He described the Arab League foreign ministers who decided to freeze relations with Israel and to isolate it as premature and doesn't serve the peace process. ■

Dakamseh's lawyer says client's testimony will help his case

Continued from page 1

he was provoked by the laughter of the Israeli girls while he was preforming his noon prayer and by the attempt of one of the girls to take pictures of him," the investigation report stated. Al Najdawi disclosed that the girls shot were between the ages of 18 and 20 years and not in their early teens as the Israelis had claimed. Also the girls were accompanied by five men at the time.

Dakamseh, according to Al Najdawi, said that there were previous attempts of provocation of Jordanian soldiers in Baqoura by Israeli visitors.

Al Najdawi confirmed that the law requires the testimony of all witnesses. In addition to the colleagues of the soldier there are those testimonies of the Israeli girls who survived. They will give their testimonies to the authorities in Israel. This requires Jordanian investigators to go to Israel, hear them and see the report of the medical examiner. It will then be attached to the report concluded by the Jordanian military committee.

Al Najdawi said his client is "madly in love with his country and its military honor. He stressed that Dakamseh is "apolitical: someone who prays but does not belong to any political organization."

Lawyers expect Dakamseh to be charged with "murder and military disorder." Concerning the murder charges, Al Najdawi says the case depends on how the attack was committed, if it was deliberate or if it was an excuse.

The sentence can range from six months to death. Al Najdawi believes that "the Jordanian law imposes the death penalty if the crime was premeditated." He adds that "Israeli law likewise, does not have a death penalty clause at all." He is confident that the testimony of Dakamseh would serve him well in court.

Official sources categorically deny Israeli claims that Israeli investigators have been involved in the interrogation of Dakamseh. They stress that the investigation is handled by a three-man Jordanian military committee.

However, police are manning checkpoints on the roads to Ebder village, 88 kilometers north Amman, the hometown of the Dakamseh family, opposition sources said. The popular committee set up to defend Ahmad Al Dakamseh protested at what they called "a siege around Ebder" describing such action as "state terror."

The committee that includes members from professional associations, political parties, women unions, human rights activists, and independents told a press conference, that they were worried about Dakamseh. A defence committee led by Ahmed Obeidat, a former prime minister, will be set up. Jordan's Engineers Association President Laith Shbeilat of the popular committee claimed that the government paid $300,000 in compensation for each the families' of the victims. ■



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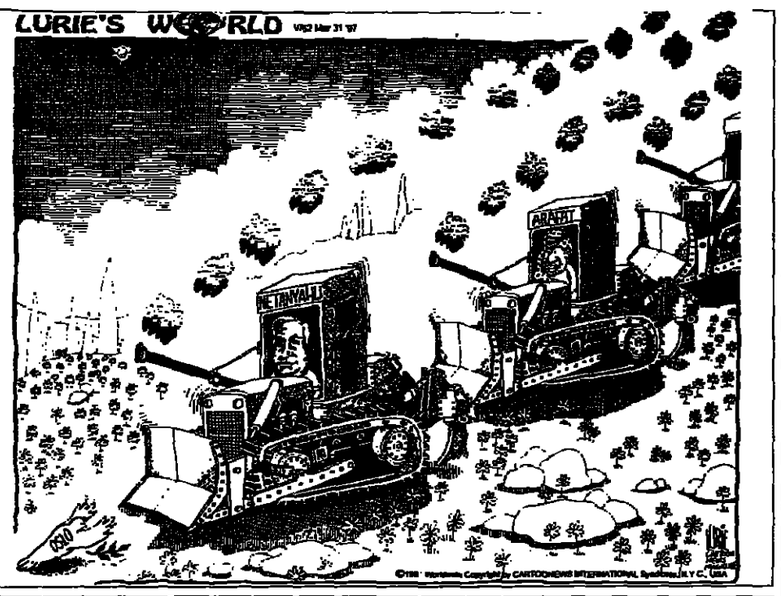
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Our Say...

Final status: PLO's response

ISRAEL IS suggesting that once the Palestinians behave themselves and accept its unilateral alterations to previous agreements, it will be ready to skip implementation of remaining phases under the Oslo accords and move directly to the final status negotiations.

The Israeli statements are being made at a time when Israeli bulldozers are still busy working at Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem and when Israeli troops are surrounding Palestinian towns and villages and clashing with civilians who continue to express their anger and disgust with Israel's policies.

Why should the Palestinians consider Benjamin Netanyahu's offer? Is it because Israel has honored all previous agreements that there is enough confidence and trust on both sides to move directly to the final status stage? Or is it that Netanyahu is so fed up with the Oslo "commitments" that he believes jumping to the last stage would effectively free him from meeting these commitments and put the initiative back in his hands?

There are many Palestinians, and Arabs, who are still bitter about the outcome of the secret talks that took place between the PLO and the government of Yitzhak Rabin back in 1993 which resulted in the Oslo agreement and the famous formula of "Gaza-Jericho First". They believe Israel was able to force its own agenda on the joint talks and that the real prize for Israel was Palestinian acceptance of new game rules for future negotiations other than those set out in the original Madrid peace conference letters of assurances, sent by the co-sponsors to all parties, and in the UN Security Council resolutions.

Still, the Oslo accord and the following Taba, Cairo and Washington agreements had specified a gradual Israeli troop "redeployment", withdrawal as Palestinians understand it, from over 90% of the Occupied Territories. Such troop withdrawal, coupled with the handing over of administrative authorities to the PNA, should have been completed by now. Only then would the two parties begin the final status negotiations which would focus on Jerusalem, refugees and other issues.

But Netanyahu's government has effectively reneged on most of Israel's commitments under these accords. The building of a Jewish settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem has driven a wedge into the peace process bringing it to a complete halt.

Now Netanyahu wants to begin immediate talks on the final status. From his government's record it is clear that his aims and objective differ dramatically from those of the Palestinians. Does he accept that East Jerusalem is an occupied territory and that it should be the capital of the future Palestinian state? Does he accept Palestinians' right to self-determination and in building their own independent state? Does he accept the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland or to be compensated? Does he accept that Jewish settlements are illegal and should be dismantled?

We all know the answers to these questions and so should President Arafat.■

Letters to the Editor

Cries in the wilderness

To The Editor,

Israel and the US fail to understand how violence erupts. Acting deaf, dumb and blind to the cries of Palestinians will produce such violence as the recent *Tel Aviv bombing*. Although, Hamas claimed responsibility, I hold Israel responsible. A criminal is not just one who throws a bomb, but it is also one who creates a destructive environment of anger and frustration.

Don't ignore Palestinians voices. Ignoring problems as Netanyahu has done will not make them go away. It will cause them to simmer before they explode.

Is it not the case that Israel has trivialized the Palestinians perceptions, pain, and concerns with regard to Jerusalem? Are they not claiming it as "Jewish Land" only? Jerusalem is not "disputed land." According to International Law, East Jerusalem is Arab land! The settlements are being built against the will and law of the international community. It is important to be reminded that it was the UN which created Israel. So, if Jerusalem is considered "disputed land," than the existence of Israel is also a matter of "dispute"!

Injustice and oppression in Israel against the Palestinians will continue to produce violence.

Israel is responsible for creating the unjust and oppressive environment which produced the violence as predicted. The building of illegal settlements, the demolition of homes and destruction of property, the maltreatment and brutal beatings of the Palestinians, the imprisoned detainees without charge, the definition of the Palestinians as "permanent residents" in their homeland all contribute to the unrest in the region.

Therefore, Israel must be held responsible for the injustice and oppression against the Palestinian people. We need to come to an understanding that peace and love do not grow in oppressive and unjust environments.

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The Lucifer Principle;

Another excuse to bash Muslims and Arabs

By Imran Nasrullah

IT IS amazing what a person can get away with under the pretense of science. Mr Bloom certainly evinces his near bigotry of Islam in the *The Islamic World and Arabs under the Guise of Science*. The book is merely a vehicle to support a political agenda disguised as science. This is not too surprising since it comes from a political writer.

The author derides Islam. Prophet Muhammed, and Muslims by making seemingly factual historical and theological statements. The statements carry a virulent undertone through an arsenal of words that appear innocuous on their face but actually holds derision and contempt. Bloom relies on scientific terminology to create a smoke screen of authority for a bigoted message.

Bloom utilizes two hot topics of science to veil his bigotry, sociobiology (genetics) and memes. Memes is the new buzzword in science that had been promulgated originally by Richard Dawkins' book *The Selfish Gene*. Memes represent units of information that spread across populations, and down generations acting on the mindset of persons and populations. The analogy is that just as genes pass inheritable information (like brown eyes and a big nose) down generations through procreation and across populations through promiscuity: so to do memes. And like genes, memes are subject to mutation, and natural selection depending on the merit of the idea. Presumably, bad ideas die out while good ideas pass on, just as deleterious genes are weeded out of the gene pool, but beneficial genes are propagated.

On a genetic level, the author extrapolates that genetically programmed animal behavior can directly explain societal behavior. His extrapolation represents a large logical leap that can't be proved, merely inferred. Admittedly, genetics influences behavior through subsequent biochemical and endocrinologic action. However, it is questionable whether it creates, by mass action, killer cultures. Where is the evidence? Where is the experimental evidence demonstrating that genes operate collectively in an orchestrated manner to produce killer cultures?

Regarding killer cultures, Bloom spends significant page space to point out that Islamic cultures (particularly Arabs) by nature have an inherent blood lust, and that Islam justifies the blood lust. Why does Bloom single out Islamic cultures as the example of killer cultures? Why not other killer cultures? What about violence in Norse culture, Aryan culture, Mongol culture, European Medieval culture and American culture? Bloom asserts that Islamic cultures in particular, glorify violence, yet how much violence is depicted in our most prevalent cultural medium, television? We glorify violence. This nation was built on violence.

As a nation, America cannot even negotiate the disarmament of its own citizens because guns and violence are integrally tied to our history and unfortunately our future. Starting with Columbus and ending with the present day, European colonialism and later American colonialisms systematically exterminated civilizations as part of domestic expansionist policies. For example, Columbus massacred the South American Indians, while President Andrew Jackson proudly destroyed North American Indian nations. Ask the American Indian how the West was won? Or ask the Blackman why he is so enraged, but for his enslavement? (see Howard Zinn's *A Peoples History of the US*) What is unconscionable is that cover this aspect of history while as a country we revel in their acts. You have to ask who has the killer culture?

In this country we glorify violence through television and cinema. For example, in Arnold Scwarzenegger's international blockbuster, True Lies, the hero systematically, guns down, hacks, and blows up the Arabs. Why? Because, as Scwarzenegger patriotically justifies, ... they were all bad. A year or two later, Steven Seagal and Kurt Russell play American goodguys rescuing a plane hijacked by...? You guessed it, Muslims. Hollywood's solution to the Islamic community protesting stereotypes was to lamely insert a one line proclamation by one of the hijackers that hijacking is not Islam! before being executed by one of his own men. How is that for a meme! In fairness, there are citizens of good conscience who object to violence on TV and the movies, but sadly their voices aredrowned out by corporate America. And despite this violence, we export television violence (and weapons of war) to the third world, whether theylike it or not (see Ben Barber's Jihad vs. McWorld) and then blame them for being uncivilized.

If violence is in the genes, as Bloom argues, then why, as a Semitic race, are Jews not subject to the killer culture but Arabs are? Or are they? Certainly history has shown the old kings of Judaism wiped out wholetribes for not believing in the same God as them (see Karen Armstrong's *Holy War*). But forget about the past, we only need to examine Israel's modern day tactics of dehumanizing, debilitating, discounting, and destroying Palestinian agrarian society and culture. Bloom asserts that Islamic fundamentalism/terrorism is the consequence of one meme nibbling at the flesh of other cultures. Yet, state sponsored terrorism under the blanket of Israel's self-defense escapes Bloom's Middle-East scrutiny. Which superorganism "nibbles at the flesh" of which superorganism?

The author even discredits the Islamic reaction to the invasion of the Europeans during the Crusades, citing it as an example of typical Islamic behavior.

Any distrust by Islamic cultures towards the Europeans (due to the Crusades and European colonialism) is an over-reaction by Muslims. Bloomeven asserts that the Crusades were merely an attempt at European Christians as regaining what was rightfully theirs to begin with. Specifically, the author claims that because Christianity and Judaism arose out of the Middle-East, the Europeans (the West) deserves to take it back. The whole period of the Crusades cannot be excused as an attempt at reinstituting "Western" values in a region that was formerly Christian. Christianity is not the same as Western-secular values. Ask Christian Arabs, who are culturally the same as Muslim Arabs, and completely different from Americans and Europeans and their culture. Similarly, the colonialist mentality of the European powers cannot be excused. The complete subjugation, denigration, and massacre of whole populations in Algeria, India (and Pakistan), the Levant warrants ire by these peoples. But never mind them, ask the Black man in America why he is so enraged by American ethnocentrism. Any attempt to correctly point out the injustices committed by the American colonials against the blacks are dismissed as revisionist history. In America the "meme of Rome" is a source of pride as manifested by architecture and language, yet Rome was one of the most infamous killer cultures in all of history. What was Massada all about? Why is this point never brought out ?

The author's other point regarding killer cultures is that aside from genetics influencing behavior, memes play a powerful role in controlling individuals, communities and cultures. As Bloom argues, religion constitutes a powerful meme capable of manipulating men and society to commit atrocious acts of violence. And of course the author singles the sinister Islamic meme as the threat to all civilized cultures. In fact he goes so far as to connote the Islamic meme of terrorism as nibbling on the flesh of other societies, primarily Western-secular. Here the interesting usage of words attributes cannibalism to Islam. The author argues the Islamic meme teaches and condones global terrorism.

> ***The author argues the Islamic meme teaches and condones global terrorism. Bloom conveniently ignores the destructive memes in other religions that have resulted in bloodshed, e.g. Baruch Goldstein executing 29 worshippers in a mosque, or IRA bombings in the UK, or the Bosnian genocide by Serbian Christians.***

Bloom conveniently ignores the destructive memes in other religions that have resulted in bloodshed, e.g. Baruch Goldstein executing 29 worshippers in a mosque, or IRA bombings in the UK, or the Bosnian genocide by Serbian Christians.

Religion represents a meme encapsulating an ideology often in conflict with the meme of Western-secular thought, and its subculture consumerism (see Jihad vs. McWorld). It is not intrinsic to Islam, but affects all religions that try and maintain a sense of tradition. For example, the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe is experiencing "rampant Capitalism" as a direct threat to its traditions.

But again, Bloom attacks Islamic ideology as the anathema toWestern-secularism and the American way of life.

If Bloom would show that under the meme of Islam, starting from the Middle Ages, he would show that freedom of religion flourished, science, philosophy, and the high arts flourished. Perhaps then others might understand what Muslims are seeking to regain. Bloom continues to misinform the readership by claiming, almost by cliche, that Muslims arrived in Jerusalem with sword in hand. Rather, the Islamic armies had always respected the People of the Book and did not force conversion of Christians and Jews, unlike the Spanish Inquisition.

In fact, under the Islamic civilization, both Jews and Christians could worship freely. Under the Islam, women were given property and inheritance rights, divorce rights, and the right to conduct businesses.

Meanwhile, the "Christian" meme out of Europe was pondering whether women had souls; were burning so-called witches alive; and bleeding persons to death to cure infection. Given the barbaric nature of the European Dark Ages, European colonialism, and Western neocolonialism, why wouldn't Muslims want their heritage back, and why wouldn't they fight for it? Why are the Muslims not allowed to bring back the pride of their heritage, without the ignominy of "fundamentalism" being attached? Colonialism took Muslim pride away, and continues to do so under a new economic colonialism of the New World Order (Korten's *When Corporations Rule the World*). The backlash exhibited by Muslims is not happening because Muslims are violent by nature, but rather out of a frustrating realization that their cultural and spiritual identity being subsumed by *Bay Watch*, Coca-Cola, Nike, Planet Reebok, and MTV. (Jihad vs. McWorld) Certainly this is worth fighting for? The American Indians fought for their rights to survive, both culturally and spiritually and despite conversion to Christianity, they were either wiped out, deported to uninhabitable reservations, or diluted out of existence.

Religious memes can be dangerous, but in the larger context, those memes that induce violence die out, but the larger memes survive. Thus, while the memes of extremism (whether Jewish, Christian or Islamic) are intense they die out quickly, but the larger memes like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam survive.

Western-secular memes can be equally sinister. One only needs to witnesss loganeering during times of war in an effort to demonize the opponent. In the Reagan era, the Soviet Union was the Evil Empire, the only thing lacking was Reagan referring to Gorbachev as Darth Vader. During the Gulf War, and immediately prior to Crossing the Line in the Sand, the Bush administration's propaganda machine began to systematically manipulate the American psyche. This was noticeable even in the way Bush would pronounce Saddam Hussein in one mimute sound bites. For example, at one time Saddam, was perjoratively pronounced Sad-DAMN, obviously connoting damnation. And at another time, the pronunciation was changed to sound-like SOD-om Hussein. Here, the negative pejorative connotes sodomy. The slogan "Free Kuwait," attached to every bumper sticker during the Gulf War, demonstrated how people jumped onto bandwagons without thinking through a complex issue. Most Americans did not even know where Kuwait was prior to the war. Yet, in the national consciousness of America, we were ready to send troops to fight for a non-democratic country noted for human rights violations. Historically, the Red Scare during the McCarthy era created a political witch-hunt where lives were ruined merely on innuendo that a person was a communist. A tragic irony, despite the First Amendment's Constitutional guarantee to free speech. These examples of irrationality demonstrates the powerful suggestive effect of a virulent meme. Virulent memes ablates rationality rather than promotes it.

Western secular memes compete with the ideologies of tradition found in Islam and other religions. This competition is fought on the political front.

Politics comprises the forum where memes become extremely influential because politics is where memes are implemented. Given Bloom's career as a political writer, he is probably keenly aware of this fact. By what better means is there to further a political agenda than to manipulate the superorganism through "memetic engineering."

As such, superorganisms (collections of peoples of like culture orideology) like AIPAC and the World Jewish Congress, on behalf of Israel, influence American opinion through memetic engineering (Could this be altruism with in a species of superorganisms?). The tools of manipulation, rather than being restriction enzymes and polyacryl amidegels in genetic engineering, are newspapers (*New York Times*), television, and satellites (STAR TV, owned by Rupert Murdoch, beams shows like BayWatch to countries of traditional values regardless of whether they object to such programming-see Jihad vs. McWorld). By controlling the flow of information (memes) you can influence politics. Consequently, by controlling the meme the memetic engineer manipulates the superorganism. Howard Bloom's book is merely another attempt at distorting fact in order to influence the general populations opinion to a misunderstood, and complex issue.

Mimetic engineering alters cultural evolution by numbing the mind and precluding critical thinking. Memes should be analyzed for their content, just as genes are sequenced for theirs, to see if they deserve to bepassed on and augmented. Analysis of the Lucifer Principle will reveal that Bloom's book is a meme cultivating mistrust, stereotyping, and misunderstanding of Islam. The meme is based on misinformation and history according to Bloom; it is "The World According to Bloom." Let shope this meme dies out. ■

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Middle East Beat
by Khairi Jambo

Rafsanjani's pilgrimage

IN ADDITION to being one of the main pillars of Islam, and a duty for all capable Muslim, pilgrimage or (Haj) to Mecca is the best opportunity for Muslims from different creeds and colors the world over, to meet and know about each other's circumstances in the spirit of peace and brotherhood.

Since the advent of the revolution that overthrew the shah in 1979, relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran fluctuated between hostility, in terms of war of words, and cold peace. It was the wrong start from the beginning. Yet both countries had their own justified suspicions about each other, with Iran and its new regime trying to establish a foothold in the region, and more importantly prove that its revolution can sustain its momentum and survival in a sea of paranoia that verges on self-doubt. And Saudi Arabia, with its traditional structure of power, leading role in Islamic affairs, and the strength of the petro-dollar.

However, both had one thing in common, when they looked for internal points of weakness, something which could prove a travel spot if exploited by the other. Both had Islamic schools of thought with a large following that have been targetted in both countries, under the fear of unreliability and disloyalty.

In Iran, the large Sunni minority started being viewed with suspicion, as if they would have automatic loyalty to the Saudis. In Saudi Arabia, the Shiite minority started to be viewed as an alien entity, despite the fact that it has a Saudi-Arab identity, and a shared heritage of reverence to the Imam Ali.

Perhaps, president Rafsanjani's pilgrimage, may create the sufficient atmosphere to reduce the gap of misconceptions held by both countries and reaffirm the fact that in the formula of the region being a Shiite and holding reverence to Imam Ali is neither alien to the Arab world nor to Sunni Islam, and does not mean an automatic shift of loyalty to Iran.

Iraq will also be an important dimension to discuss. After reducing the recent diplomatic tension with Turkey, Iran must be looking towards Saudi Arabia to improve the current relationship in what seems to be an effort to play the central role in deciding the future developments in the increasingly encircled Iraq.

The discrepency in respective roles, created in the heat of the Gulf war (I&II) when Saudi Arabia was primarily an Iraqi ally against Iran, while in the second Gulf encounter, Saudi Arabia played a major antagonistic role against Iraq, with Iran being passively hostile to both Arab countries, especially due to the presence of American forces in the region as the case may indicate when it comes to Saudi Arabia.

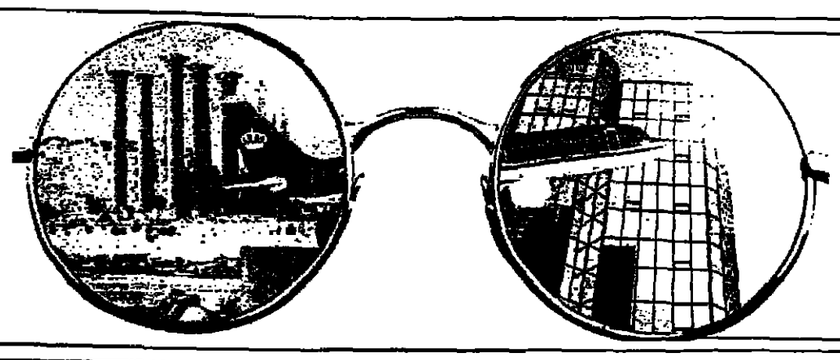
The consequences of the two Gulf conflicts will be dealt with in this trip, and president Rafsanjani will be looking towards reducing the threatening veneer of Iran in the minds of the moderate Arab states. He would also seek to build bridges of confidence in the region to pull Iran out of its isolation, and attempt to extend its political role towards the Mediterranean. However, the most valuable gift that might be gained out of this effort, is the possibility of mediation by Saudi Arabia to reduce the existing tension between the Iranian and the American governments.

Rafsanjani can certainly pull a diplomatic coup if he succeeds in convincing the Saudis to mediate in this, and if he can offer the Americans what concessions they may require, to push for a possible rapproachements.

This pilgrimage, may be carrying more news behind the scenes than will be broadcast to us on television. ■

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Water resources still below our increasing needs

AMMAN (Star)—Regional water cooperation is a vital issue in the Middle East. The view that we could face an acute water crisis in the next 20 to 30 years, has sent alarm bells ringing.

Regional institutions have been at the forefront in calling for a more concerted strategy to better manage and control water resources in the region.

The necessity for a well-planned strategy for bilateral and regional co-operation in the field of water resources was the top of the ESCWA agenda earlier this week.

It convened the first session of the Committee on Water Resources last Sunday under the patronage of the Minister of Water and Irrigation, Munther Haddadin.

Haddadin and the ESCWA Executive Secretary, Dr Hazem Biblawi stressed the need for a unified stance to face the water challenges in light of the rapid increase in population and the demand on water.

Haddadin, a water expert, who headed the Jordanian side of the Multi-lateral Working Group on Water in the peace talks, does not belive in the crisis syndrome. He plainly sees the issue in terms of careful managment of water and cooperation.

Haddadin pointed out that interested parties involved in water utilization should reach an agreement on dividing water resources and preserve them as a first step towards bilateral and regional co-operation. This helps to exchange data on water resources utilization which means better manage and control water resources.

The water problem in Jordan, according to Haddadin, is the result of a disequilibrium between water resources and population growth. Talking about this area of the world, he stated that the sharp increase in population in these semi-arid areas is much more than the available water resources.

Planning did not succeed in preparing for the water challenges. The expense of carrying out water projects is high, that is whether in the process relating to operating these projects or in providing maintenance and in checking them between new and then.

According to Haddadin, water and energy exist hand in hand. Water is necessary for generating energy, while the latter is a must for the desalination of salty water.

He added that because of the dry environment especially in the eastern badia, in Jordan, "we suffer from shortage in both water and energy."

He pointed out that the challenges are increasing and "we have to take serious action to preserve these resources and protect them against pollution, over-utilization and bad quality."

Haddadin said, "our target should be to maintain the utmost high level of competence in water storage, distribution, transport and utilization. Moreover, "we have to make greater use of any type of water, and make sure that we fully utilize it to the limit." This means no water wastage. This is in addition to encouraging regional co-operation programs in this field.

However, Haddadin stressed that the most pressing challenge is the requirements of the free market economy in the light of the move towards the European partnership and the World Trade Organization(WTA). Membership in these institutions requires removing distortions, "naturally the economy of resources and the cost of their services is one of those distortions that should be resolved," Haddadin added.

Al Biblawi pointed out to the project that is currently carried out jointly by ESCWA and Germany, which is related to hydrologic and hydrogeologic studies on water resources.

ESCWA's future activities in the water resources field include modernization of methods used in water resources assessment, establishment of environmental standards in the regional water sector, ideal management of aquifers in selected areas, and follow-up of the water-related recommendations of Agenda 21.

Participating in this first session and in the subsequent Expert Group Meeting are government representatives from ESCWA member states, experts from Arab, regional and international organizations active in the field of water resources, and representatives of United Nations regional organizations.

During the Export Group Meeting on Regional Water Studies experts reviewed ESCWA's recent investigation studies on basalt acquifers and water resources assessment using remote sensing techniques. In addition, they discussed ESCWA's on-going study on the regional carbonate aquifer in the ESCWA region. The meeting proposed plans of action and recommendations to implement future regional water studies. ■

Business scene

■ Sales of the Jordan Worsted Mills Co., were JD 10.3 million, including exports of JD 1.7 million, in 1996. This is compared with total sales of JD 12.3 million in 1995. The company's management is doing its best to improve the quality of its textiles by buying the latest equipment to increase its sales in domestic and world markets. Its net profit last year was JD 2.45 million and it increased its share investments by 10.6% by boosting its portfolio in the Al Zay Readywear Co. and the International Hotels Co. The company's capital is JD 4 million.

■ The Jordan Investment Fund is expected to be operational by May. Sources at the Housing Bank, the owner of the Fund, said that its capital is JD 20 million. The Fund signed an agreement between the Housing Bank and the American Alliance Capital, which has wide experience in managing investment funds worldwide. It will be registered at the Bahrain Stock Exchange and its shares will be traded in the Amman Financial Market, upon mutual agreement between the two markets. Officials at the Housing Bank decided to choose Bahrain as headquarters for the Fund.

The Fund is targetted at attracting foreign capital and Jordanian expatriates investments. Subscriptions is initially fixed at 100 dinars per share, and the lowest rate for investment is 10 shares. It is the first investment fund to be especially established for debt securities and Jordanian shares.

■ Net profits of the Real Estate Investment (Akarco) totalled JD 411,647 this year including JD 38,517 from last year. Akarco plans to increase its stake in the Islamic Bank and its contribution in the capital of the Islamic Insurance Co.

Foreign Exchange

Wednesday, 2 April

	Buy JD	Sell JD
US $	0.7080	0.7100
£	1.1432	1.1489
DM	0.4152	0.4173
SFr	0.4772	0.4796
FRF	0.1231	0.1237
YEN (100)	0.5678	0.5706
DEL	0.3699	0.3717
LET (100)	0.0421	0.0423

Chairman of Arab bank calls for encouragement of exports

THE ARAB Bank's great achievements in 1996 marks a continuing progress in its past 67-year history. Due to its strategy, the bank recorded positive results last year. It made profits of JD 95.7 million compared to JD 15.2 million in 1995, a rise of 18.9 percent.

The chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arab Bank, Abdul Majeed Shoman said the bank is distributing 40 percents of its profits among the shareholders. However, the remainder is to be held in reserve.

The results of the Arab Bank branches also recorded high profit levels at $197.8 million in 1996. This is a rise of $29.8 million over 1995, Shoman said.



Shoman

The Arab Bank budget which reached JD 13.5 billion last year puts it in the third rank among banks in the Arab world. However, the two banks which occupy the first and second rank are joint enterprises between the public and private sectors.

Moreover, Shoman added that the Arab Bank was the first private institution to be established in the region after the Bank of Egypt which was established in the 1920s. The Arab Bank was established in 1930 in Jerusalem.

It continued to grow. Come Palestinian self-rule, the Arab Bank set up branches in Gaza and the West Bank.

At present, the Bank has 14 branches in Palestinian cities. There will be more branches in Hebron, Jenin and Ramallah.

The Bank also contributed to the capital of the Arab Palestinian Bank for Investment with a stake of 55 percent to support industrial and housing developments in Palestine.

Speaking on the local scene, Shoman said the banking sector is vital to the economic progress of Jordan. However, he told Ad Dustour the bank mergers that are taking place are healthy for a more active economy.

The monetary policy of the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) to maintain the value of the dinar against other currencies and foreign reserves to meet the basic needs of people and industries, is seen by Shoman as positive. However, he stressed that the Central Bank has to guide industry, and not only to help it to cover its domestic needs but also to encourage exports.

He elaborated that no country can secure its needs of foreign currency unless it gives support to the promotion of exports. This will enhance productivity and create more job opportunities.

The CBJ policy to increase interest rates to maintain the value of the dinar is wise, however Shoman said that some sectors may be negatively affected by this strategy.

They may consider this strategy as an additional burden on productivity and limits any expansion in industrial activities.

There is a noticeable rise in what Shoman calls the "duplication" in industrial production and this may have a negative effect on the economy.

The Arab Bank chairman said that facilities offered by some banks are higher than the deposits they have. Some are lending as high as 110%, and this should not exist. The Central Bank calls on these banks to lower their facilities to avoid speculation in stocks at the AFM.

Shoman points out that foreign investment in Jordan is still small because of size of the market, which limits the movement of foreign capital.

In Jordan, Shoman said banks are able to meet the needs of the market in terms of capital and finance. However, the activity of foreign institutions is small. Foreign banks are interested in buying Jordanian shares, but the yield for these investors is much lower than their expectations.

Shoman pointed out that the shortage of liquidity affects investment. Investors are always looking on the size of return on their investment and in as little time as possible. They are not prepared for long term investments. Investors may prefer to put their money in the bank which guarantees a yield of at least 10 percent or higher. ■

Business Chronicle

AFM concludes March dealings with a sharp decline

WHILE SHARE dealings at the Amman Financial Market (AFM) maintained a relatively stable level during last month, a mood of anxiety continues to prevail on the market.

After the Eid holiday last February, the official indicator recorded its highest level since 1995 to reach 175 points or more. Such increase then was attributed to the implementation of the oil-for-food deal and what is called the fruits that Jordanian manufactures can receive from the deal. However, when 10 local companies got the approval last week to export their produce to Iraq, the official index only registered a half point increase.

The February rise was also encouraged by other economic legislations (companies draft law and securities draft to be approved soon) to encourage investments and increase capital flow to the market, positive developments on the political arena such as the Hebron deal and the improving commercial ties between Jordan and the Palestinian territories.

But the main reason of the rise is seen by dealers to be the noticeable increase in the share of the Arab Bank that hit the JD 265 mark last February.

In contrast, the Arab Bank share is seen presently as the cause of the decline that ended the month's upward trend last week. The Arab Bank share value dropped to JD 251-253.

Brokers at the AFM attribute the decline and the fluctuations in share prices to political developments in the region that cast their shadow on any economic activity.

Others say that the present stock prices at the AFM are encouraging. What is frustrating according to these brokers, is the shortage of liquidity which limit the activity of dealers. Added to this, the results of financial companies for 1996 are seen by dealers to be unsatisfactory and not good enough.

The absence of lending and influential institutions (those owned by banks and investment funds) from the hall of share dealings also counts for the decline.

Naturally, the stalemate in the peace process and the violent actions that erupted late last month still have their stormy effect on the mood of dealers and investors.

However, other dealers still see that there is room for optimism and expect active movement in traded shares before Eid Al Adha. ■

Favourite frequent flyer scheme extended

BRITISH AIRWAYS and American Airlines have agreed to extend their frequent flyer program relationship.

From 30 March, British Airways' Executive Club members and American Airlines Advantage Members can "earn and burn" mileage on each other's networks and earn points towards ties status of their respective frequent flyer scheme.

The deal includes all British Airways services within the UK and between the UK and continental Europe, the Middle and Far East, Africa, and Australasia and all American Airlines services throughout Canada, USA, Latin America, the Caribbean and Japan.

It excludes all non-stop transatlantic services from either carrier from any point in the Americans to any point in Europe.

It builds on the existing agreement between the two carriers which currently allows some members of each program to spend their miles on each other's airline.

The arrangement replaces the frequent flyer agreement between British Airways and US Airways which ended on 29 March.

Bob Ayling, British Airways' chief executive said: "We believe the extended program will be good news for our customers since both we and American Airlines have wide networks which are to a large extent, complementary. This will give our passengers a very wide scope, both to earn mileage, and to benefit from the miles they have earned."

British Airways now has more than 20 frequent flyer airline partners including Qantas, Canadian Airlines, Deutsche BA, TAT, Brymon Airways, Alaska Airlines, American West Airlines, all Nippon Airways, Passages, Jet Airways, Brethons and British Airways' franchises.

British Airways Executive Club was recently voted the best frequent flyer program in the world for the third year running by readers of the Executive Travel magazine. ■

Aden's future plans recall a great past

By Robin Allen

FOR MORE than 100 years until 1967, Aden was regarded by shipping companies as one of the world's great natural harbours and busiest duty free ports. Four civil wars later, it remains Yemen's most valuable asset.

After protracted financial negotiations, a $580 million redevelopment scheme is close to being agreed which would also constitute Yemen's first overseas-led privatization program.

A deal will largely depend, according to western diplomats in Sana'a, on whether European governments will provide export credit cover for Yemen. This in turn will be influenced by how much the government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh is willing to restrain Yemeni vested interests in favor of economic development.

But there is general agreement in both Yemeni and foreign business circles that redeveloping the port could be the catalyst for transforming Aden's run-down industrial infrastructure and for breathing new life into Yemen's economy.

The sole investor behind the plan is Yemen Investment & Development International (Yeminvest), a company wholly owned by Saudi Arabia's Bin Mahfouz family. Yeminvest proposes to develop the port of Aden on a 25-30 year build-operate own-transfer basis under a concession agreement with the Yemen Free Zone Public Authority (YFZPA). The agreement was ratified by the Yemeni cabinet last April.

In the first phase, the harbor channels, including a 690m-wide turning area, will be dredged, a new transhipment container terminal on Aden's North Shore will be built and the existing Ma'alla terminal ugraded.

A small 15MW power station is also planned together with basic infrastructure.

The Netherlands' Royal Boshalis Westminister is due to start the dredging this month under a contract worth $6 million-$7 million. Yeminvest's deadline for completion of the first phase is March 1999.

In the second and third phases, a free zone area and a large power station will be built and Aden's airport at Khormaksar modernized.

Yeminvest is talking to the Port of Singapore Authority about managing the Ma'alla terminal, said Mr Cherif Sedky, Yeminvest director. "We can open and operate Ma'alla and generate revenues very early on," he added. However, neither a port authority nor the Yemen government would have an equity stake. "There is no public sector involvement," said Mr Sedky.

Talks with the World Bank and its affiliates on financing the $280 million first phase "are at an advanced stage," according to Mr Matthias Moser, leader of the project, finance team at financial advisers Deutsche Morgan Grenfell (DMG).

According to Yeminvest and DMG, the World Bank has already approved in principle $50 million-worth of political risk cover under its Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency program.

Its private-sector affiliate, the International Finance Corporation, has given "positive signals" to the idea of taking a small equity stake.

Discussions on limited recourse financing from commercial banks would start in "about three months," DMG said. The process of choosing a main contractor to build the container terminal would also start in about three months.

Viability of the entire scheme could now hang on the response from European export credit agencies which have no formal cover for Yemen, although export credit guarantees are given by some individual European countries on a bilateral basis. According to Mr Moser, the investors hope to bring in export credit agency co-financing on a project finance basis.

"A number of the most important agencies have said they would positively consider this," he declared.

Mr Abdul Qader Bajammal, Yemen's deputy prime minister, for planning and development, says formal cover with the European Union could be restored at the end of June when the EU council of ministers is expected to ratify Yemen's association agreement with the EU.

Mr Bajammal said Yemen would sign this agreement on 22 April. Ratification would put Yemen on the same basis for export credit guarantees as other Middle East and North African countries that already have EU association agreements.

According to senior western diplomats, however, "the ECA process is less straight-forward than Mr Bajammal would have it." Individual EU countries will first want to be satisfied about the repayment schedule on Yemen's outstanding bilateral debts.

Port management professionals also want restrictions on the involvement of the YFZPA, which has no experience of port or free zone management.

Western diplomats agree. "The Free Zone Authority is a definite obstacle in the way of the port of Aden development," said one. ■

Financial Times syndication

MARKET WATCH

29 March-1 April

Highest and lowest performing stocks in the Amman Financial Market

SATURDAY	%	SUNDAY	%	MONDAY	%	TUESDAY	%
✦ Jordan Int'l Trade Center	5.77	✦ Nayzak Dies and Moulds	1.79	✦ Industry Union	5.43	✦ General Investment	4.92
✦ United Financial Investment	4.49	✦ Middle East Complex	1.25	✦ National Plastic Industry	1.96	✦ United Engineering	4.88
✦ Universal Ceramic Industry	2.56	✦ National Steel Industry	0.95	✦ El-Zey Ready Wear Industry	1.10	✦ Universal Oil Manufacture	2.11
✦ Real Estate	5.10	✦ Middle East Hotels	5.30	✦ National Oil Manufacturing	5.33	✦ Alkanger Industry	5.10
✦ Jordan Yogurt	5.10	✦ Commercial Industries	5.13	✦ International Union	5.22	✦ Philadelphia Insurance	5.00
✦ United Land Development	5.13	✦ National Oil Manufacturing	5.06	✦ JOFECO	5.13	✦ Bank of Philadelphia	5.00

General Price Pointer	152.81	152.150	151.780	151.630
Trade Volume	713115	1077864	482057	756724
Stock Volume	663194	511131	434533	383483
Highest Traded Stocks				
✦ Middle East Complex	199234	✦ Middle East Complex 322758	✦ Jordan Electricity 83980	✦ Arab Bank 312010

All data provided by ACCESS Tel: 646868 Fax: 646949

Palestinian forces keep order in West Bank

By Barton Gellman



Palestinian police attempt to stop a masked youth from hurling stones

NABLUS, West Bank—After helping burn a model bulldozer and a home-made Israeli flag, Mohammed Nimr, 25, marched with thousands of fellow Palestinians here last Sunday to throw stones at Israeli soldiers hunkered down nearby.

They never reached their targets. Palestinian police, forming disciplined lines, wielded batons and plastic shields and repelled the surging protesters from the tomb of the biblical patriarch Joseph.

In this self-ruled Palestinian city, that Jewish shrine is the last redoubt of Israeli control: it was the scene of gun battles six months ago in which six Israeli soldiers lost their lives.

Palestinian forces "shot in the air and created human chains," said Nimr, a construction worker who was looking for confrontation with troops of the Jewish state. "I was very angry, but you can't clash with your own police."

Nablus was the toughest test, but that pattern held throughout the West Bank. On this 11th day of violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli troops—with fears of serious bloodshed during the annual Land Day protests—Palestinian and Israeli security forces worked together to keep the confrontations in check.

"I have to say that in most places the Palestinian police made visible efforts to deal with the incidents," Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai told reporters in a mid-day news conference.

It was not exactly a partnership of friends. In an implicit threat, Israeli commanders codenamed their response Operation Flaming Steel. They dispatched about two dozen armored vehicles, including several main battle tanks, to the southern gate of town. Palestinian officials warned the Jewish state against attempts to reconquer any territory now in Palestinian control.

"We have many police officers and security personnel, and if Israel decides to invade the cities ... we would not welcome them with flowers," said Kamel Hmeid, a senior Palestinian official in Bethlehem.

A shared sense of self-interest, beneath the bluster, made for close coordination throughout the West Bank.

Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority sponsored many of the marches last Sunday, and it mass-produced color photographs of Abdallah Khalil Salah, a university student shot dead by Israeli troops last Saturday night. But it spread the word against fighting Israeli soldiers, and it took vigorous steps to intervene when the fighting began.

"The (Palestinian) governor of Nablus is using the mosque loudspeakers to urge people to keep away from Israeli soldiers," said Zohair Dubie, who, as a muezzin, calls the Muslim faithful to prayer using the same loudspeakers.

Israeli leaders, while acknowledging the Palestinian help, were not prepared to say that Arafat had met their demands to resume the full-scale security cooperation suspended in angry exchanges after a 21 March suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv sidewalk cafe.

"I think we have had here a virtual collapse of the peace process," Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said on CBS television's "Face the Nation." "What we have found here, though, is that the Palestinian side has unleashed terrorism as a weapon of negotiation. We want to see the peace process continue without the threat of terrorism."

There were concerns that Salah's funeral last Sunday morning in Beit Sahur, south of Jerusalem, would inflame Sunday's annual commemoration of the shooting death of six Arabs during Israeli land expropriations in 1976. The young man's body was draped in the Palestinian flag and held aloft with a floral wreath that described him as "the martyr, the hero." A uniformed Palestinian officer fired a three-shot military salute with his Kalashnikov assault rifle.

But when angry mourners headed for Israeli checkpoints, Palestinian security personnel spread throughout the town with two-way radios to track them.

In an hour spent at Beit Sahur's edge, in a Christian neighborhood known as YMCA, the following sequence of events was witnessed.

First, a small handful of militant youths pulled heavy rocks into the center of a road and set old tires alight. Then they began slinging stones down the hill at passing Israeli jeeps and cars headed for the Jewish settlement of Tekoah.

Soon a pair of Israeli jeeps pulled up and began firing tear gas and rubber bullets at the growing crowd.

"Get the onions!" shouted one demonstrator, as another produced a bag of them and passed it around in defense against the worst of the tear-gas effects.

Arab cars from Bethlehem raced in, spilling young men who had heard about the fight and wanted to join it. Some of the youths, holding their breath, scooped up the spurting tear-gas canisters and heaved them back at the Israelis.

"It's not our leaders who tell us what to do," said Shadi Abdel Hadi, 21, whirling a home-made leather sling and releasing stone after stone toward the junction. "It is the situation."

Not many minutes later, two truckloads of Palestinian police arrived. The police positioned themselves between the demonstrators and Israeli troops, and the confrontation soon began to wind down.

Similar episodes recurred throughout the day, from Hebron in the southern West Bank to Jenin at the northern tip.

Jenin saw some of the toughest clashes, with Israeli troops there reportedly using a gravel-shooting cannon against Palestinian crowds and more than 15 people said to be injured. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



Palestinians from the 1948 territories, hoist the Palestinian flag for the first time on the Lands Day Memorial

Violence continues following burial of Palestinian

By Nicholas Goldberg



BETHLEHEM—The 11th straight day of violence between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian youths opened last Sunday with the funeral of 20-year-old Abdullah Salah, a procession that wound angrily through the narrow streets of this ancient city past stone churches and mosques on a sunny Easter morning.

Salah's father grew hysterical and his mother keened and fainted as the body of their eldest son, shot in the chest Saturday night by Israeli soldiers during clashes near Ramallah, was taken from their house and hoisted through the streets. Salah's body was draped in the red, black and green Palestinian flag, as residents on the sidewalks watched his instantaneous transformation from neighborhood boy to martyr and symbol.

"I told him not to get involved, not to participate—and he promised me," the father wailed as a crowd of young activists took the body off for burial.

But the crowd wasn't listening to Salah's father because of the activists' deafening chants: "We will avenge you," they vowed, promising that Salah's death would lead only to firmer resistance and further battles.

Salah's death came at a crucial moment, on the 10th day of clashes following Israel's decision to begin constructing a housing project for Jews on the edges of Arab East Jerusalem. Last Sunday, Israeli security was on full alert, because of Salah's death, the first in these clashes, and partly because it was Land Day, a Palestinian holiday that commemorates 1976 riots set off by expropriation of Arab-owned land in northern Israel.



Salah

The army brought in thousands of extra troops, and put tanks and helicopters at West Bank checkpoints to help maintain order.

But although Sunday's demonstrations was widespread—protests broke out in Hebron, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin and Gaza, among other places—it remained well under control. Unlike the clashes in September, in which riots and gun battles between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian police left more than 70 people dead in less than a week, this time the Israelis were not shooting to kill and the Palestinians were not shooting at all.

In clashes of rhetoric last Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat blamed one another for endangering the battered peace process. Muslim foreign ministers meeting in Cairo, Egypt, approved a resolution that recommends freezing relations with Israel because of its settlement policies. But the resolution does not oblige any Arab country to suspend ties with Israel.

The fighting in Bethlehem began after Salah's burial, when the thousands of mourners broke up and the young men headed for the Israeli army checkpoint in front of Rachel's Tomb, where the biblical matriarch is believed to be buried.

Hamas supporters, kids from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and members of Arafat's own Fatah movement reached into back pockets for their slingshots. Some of the older boys showed great power and accuracy, while others saw their stones drop harmlessly only a few feet away.

Many of the Palestinians wore gas masks left over from the Gulf War, to continue fighting through clouds of Israeli tear gas, and others wore gloves to lob the tear gas canisters back across the checkpoint without burning their hands. Some picked up the rubber bullets that were shot at them and flung them back with their slingshots.

In Nablus, where protesters burned Netanyahu in effigy, then made for the Israeli-guarded Joseph's Tomb, three lines of Palestinian police, arms locked together, blocked their way, while other officers fired into the air to force the protesters back.

But in Bethlehem, several police officers said they had neither the orders nor the inclination to hold back the protesters.

"The people are free to do what they want," said one blue-uniformed officer.

Periodically someone would get hit in the arm or leg by a rubber bullet, and waiting ambulances would flash their lights, blare their sirens and carry away the wounded. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Algeria polls 'may help heal conflict'

By Roula Khalaf

ALGERIA'S LEGISLATIVE elections could contribute to a resolution of the Algerian conflict if all legal political parties agreed to participate, according to Mr Abdelkader Bengrina, deputy head of Algeria's unelected National Transitional Council.

However, Mr Bengrina, also a leading member of Hamas, a legal Islamist party, warned in an interview in London that government bias towards some parties would undermine the effectiveness of the vote.

The elections, scheduled for 5 June, will exclude the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the party which had won the 1991 first round of elections cancelled by the army, provoking a five-year struggle between Islamic militants and security forces. But Mr Bengrina said the inclusion in the elections of parties which had long stood by the FIS and insisted on its rehabilitation could help curb violence.

"The participation of these parties means the end of the political cover for the violence," he said. "It removes the legitimacy of armed struggle, and the moral support for terrorism."

Among the FIS's former key allies, the National Liberation Front (FLN) is riven by internal splits but its current leadership is back in the government fold. The Socialist Forces Front (FFS), which advocates dialogue with the FIS, has yet to declare its participation, although it may have little choice but to take part.

The FFS believes the political system being put in place amounts to an institutionalisation of dictatorship, since last November's constitutional amendments left the new elected assembly with limited powers.

Hamas is hoping to capitalise on the FIS exclusion by attracting Islamist voters, although the party is criticised by the FIS leadership for supporting the Algerian army-backed government. Such an outcome would be welcomed by the government, which hopes to prove the FIS is no longer a relevant political force.

Algeria's new constitution officially bars parties based on religion. But while Hamas can no longer call itself Islamist, Mr Bengrina said its Islamic tendencies would help attract those who opted for "moderate" Islam.

Like the rest of Algeria's political class, Hamas is closely watching the birth of the new "presidential" party set up last month and grouping grass-roots associations whose support was instrumental in the 1995 election of President Liamine Zeroual. Algerian opposition parties worry that the new National Democratic Rally will receive special government support. ■

Financial Times syndication



No farewell to arms race

By John Daniszewski

ABU DHABI—It was not your usual trade show: Where else could one meet AK-47 assault rifle inventor Mikhail Kalashnikov, contract former South African fighters to bolster a shaky Third World regime, bear a Raytheon Corp. vice president sing the kill ratio of his company's Patriot anti-missile defense system or see the first public live-fire demonstration of Russia's latest dual-rotor Black Shark KA-50 attack helicopter?

With such attractions, no wonder military intelligence officers and arms procurers from as far afield as Libya and North Korea jammed the fairground aisles in this emirate, agog at all that is laser-guided, stealthy, encrypted, thermal-visioned, miniaturized and digitalized in the brave new world of weaponry.

The recent four-day International Defense Exhibition, the largest arms show in the Middle East, featured more than 500 exhibitors from 42 countries selling a startling array of wares—including F-16 fighter planes, air defense systems, chemical-protection clothing and even Swiss army knives.

There were plenty of displays, besides the T-shirts, raffles, brass bands and buyers wearing a dazzling assortment of uniforms and national garbs: Want to see a 46-ton battle tank fly off a ramp and sail 20 feet through the air or watch a re-enactment of how to extract a downed pilot from behind enemy lines?

This bazaar was at times bizarre.

But its unspoken message was also serious: Tension and insecurity still reign in this region six years after the Gulf War, and uncertainty about the future has pitched the oil-rich Gulf countries into a major arms race.

The Gulf, which possesses more than half the world's known oil supplies and is thus vital to the United States and the West, is an inherently unstable area. Its two biggest, most ambitious countries — Iran and Iraq—have most of the population, while other, sparsely populated desert kingdoms possess most of the oil.

Aware of the bitter lesson of Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and anxious about Iran's future military designs, the emirs and princes of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are buying costly arms for their land, air and sea forces at a prodigious rate.

The United States is the chief beneficiary, but increasingly deals are going to Russian, European, South African and other suppliers.

These Middle East nations now account for about half the $18 billion in arms purchased worldwide each year, and the six US-aligned Gulf Cooperation Council countries will spend an estimated $75 billion on defense equipment between now and 2002, says Paul Beaver of Jane's Information Group.

The binge troubles some experts.

Kenneth Katzman, an analyst and Gulf specialist at the Congressional Research Service, said the US government and its allies must think beyond the "dual containment" of Iran and Iraq, a policy in place since the gulf war.

The policy treats both countries as a profound threat to regional stability and seeks to quarantine them. To that end, the United States has encouraged its Gulf allies to arm themselves to be able to deter—with US help—any aggressive actions by one or the other or both.

"We want to continue to keep (Iraqi President) Saddam Hussein in his box," Deputy Defense Secretary John White argued recently in Bahrain. "With respect to Iran, we see them as a long-term threat and a major exporter of terrorism in the world."

An example of the arms race in the Gulf is Iran's recent purchase of three submarines from Russia, making it the first country in the region, besides the United States, to have deep-water warfare capability. The Russian company that sold the subs to Iran, naturally enough, was in Abu Dhabi pushing the same kind of craft to Iran's neighbors.

Partly in response to the submarine threat, several Gulf countries also were shopping for advanced coastal-patrol aircraft, minesweepers and modern surface vessels capable of confronting underwater threats.

Katzman said he believes it would be better for the area's long-term security if Iran could be drawn into talks with the United States and the other Gulf countries about mutual security concerns.

"I'm not against arms sales and not squeamish about the use of military force," he said. "What I am saying is that can't be your only solution. That can't be the only tool in your arsenal. You have to have a diplomatic vision."

Arms purchases have become a source of disgruntlement in countries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, where critics say such huge spending should go toward education, jobs, social programs and the like.

And because US manufacturers pocket the largest share of arms revenue, weapons programs are seen in some quarters as a thinly disguised form of foreign aid to the United States.

"Some of the states are over-strapped in making these purchases, and US policy continues to push" them, Katzman said. "You have to look at these sales and ask what is really achieved by this"

Michael Collins Dunn, who monitors Gulf security issues in his newsletter "The Estimate," noted that the US presence in the Gulf has grown tremendously since the war with Iraq, and he contended that is what really is deterring adventures by Baghdad or Tehran.

The United States now has about 25,000 troops, 200 planes and 35 ships on permanent rotation in the region and has positioned heavy arms on land and afloat in the Indian Ocean for emergency deployment.

That makes the region moderately secure for now, Dunn said.

But the situation could change if Iraq and Iran, or the other Gulf countries, doubt the US military commitment in the region.

"If the day ever comes that the US umbrella isn't there ... then these guys would be very vulnerable," Dunn said. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

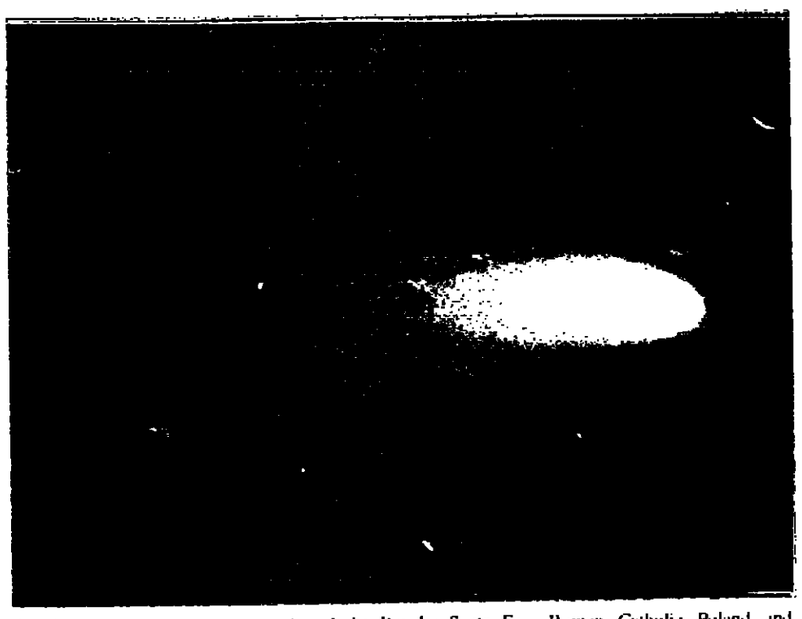
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World reaction to cult suicide

Indifference to alarm

By William D. Montalbano



LONDON—"Beam Us Up," read the banner headline in the *Mirror*. "They guzzled vodka, applesauce and lethal pills, then went gladly to their doom," said the London tabloid.

Do the dead of the Heaven's Gate cult deserve a better requiem? Or, in a world ever more hardened to unspeakable outrage, none at all?

And was the mass suicide that left 39 dead in Rancho Santa Fe just California fruitcake, or did it contain the germ of something more sinister and universal?

Los Angeles Times correspondents surveying the world's news media over the weekend found fascination with the story in some countries and a ho-hum, "just-another-cult-suicide" reaction in others.

The Chinese press, for example, passed up an easy shot at the malaise of American society. Russian newspapers were not terribly interested, nor were those in Japan, where people have become cult-hardened in the aftermath of 1995's lethal subway attack in the Tokyo subway system, blamed on the Aum Supreme Truth cult.

But in Poland, the press has viewed the Rancho Santa Fe deaths with concern, probably because the issue of religious sects is a growing one both in Roman Catholic Poland and across the rest of the former Soviet bloc.

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, far-out cults are no longer perceived as an exclusively crazy American thing; alternative religious groups are spreading everywhere, with stories of parents rescuing "kidnapped" or "brainwashed" children increasingly common.

One Polish sect, Antrovis, even shares the belief that a select group of humans will be rescued by aliens when the apocalypse nears.

And across the world, in Mexico, another cult apparently has similar beliefs. Mexico City's *Reforma* newspaper reported on a messianic cult of about 50 followers called the Academy of Future Science and quoted a cult expert as saying the group "also expects a spaceship will come for them."

In Mexico, the mass suicide has ranked among the biggest news stories north of the border in years, splashed across the front page day after day in a curious mix of fascination and concern.

"There are sects here like the US one," announced one headline in *Reforma*.

Analysts said the mass suicide is likely to refocus attention in the Mexican Congress on pending legislation, dubbed the Law of Religious Associations, that will regulate splinter sects in a nation that is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic.

Mexico City Archbishop Norberto Rivera Carrera lamented in a sermon that "religious sects, esoteric movements and gurus" are, in fact, multiplying in Mexico.

"We believe that a faith that does not embody the culture of life is not an authentic faith," the archbishop declared.

Warsaw's *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's most popular newspaper, ran a thoughtful interview with Zofia Milska-Wrzosinska, a Warsaw psychotherapist.

"Collective suicide, treated as a confirmation of the values preached by the sect, was probably not looked upon as death but as a passage into a different and better state," Milska-Wrzosinska said. "And whoever would question that value would also question the value of his very self."

Among British commentators, Jeffrey Masson, for one, counsels pragmatism: "When a religion or cult or philosophy goes underground, when you are offered rides to other planets, lists of enemies, magic potions, just say 'No, thank you.'... If we have enemies (and who does not?) a long and healthy life is the best revenge," Masson told *Guardian* readers.

There may be more to come. Michael Shermer of the Skeptics Society told the *Sunday Times*, "There are always cults and cult-like behavior surrounding millennial end times," Shermer said. "People are always looking for signs that the end is near, and here we have the comet and a (recent) lunar eclipse and the millennium. For these people, there are just too many weird things going on." ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Israeli parliament strengthens Orthodox grip

By Barton Gellman

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM—Israel's parliament voted Tuesday to strengthen the Orthodox establishment's grip on Jewish religious life, bending to a pivotal voting bloc in the ruling coalition but reviving an emotional dispute with North American Jews.

The bill, which passed its first reading but is not yet law, would grant Orthodox rabbinical courts exclusive jurisdiction over those seeking to convert to Judaism. If it took effect, the bill would reverse a Supreme Court ruling that gave hope of official recognition for Jews converted by Reform and Conservative Jewish denominations.

The return of the struggle over "who is a Jew," which drove a searing wedge between Israelis and Diaspora Jews in the 1980s, is costing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu allies at a time when he faces diplomatic isolation. Senior leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements, which together represent 3 million of the 3.5 million American Jews, threatened Tuesday to withhold lobbying support and divert as much as half— $150 million— of their annual contribution to Israel away from the government.

Netanyahu, attempting to avoid a breach with either the overseas Jews or the pivotal Orthodox voting bloc, cut a deal in which the bill would pass its first reading and the Orthodox parties would then promise to "freeze" its status in committee.

That would lock in place the Orthodox monopoly here, recognized in practice since British rule over Palestine before Israel's creation in 1948, but would not give it the status of law.

Non-Orthodox Jewish leaders, here and abroad, were skeptical that the bargain for a freeze would last, and they focused in any case on the vote's symbolic significance.

"This legislation in effect is a declaration that Reform rabbis in Israel are not rabbis, and Reform Judaism in Israel is not Judaism, and that we're all second-class Jews," said Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

In the days when Israel's survival was at stake, Yoffie said, "the Jewish community was prepared to put aside these sort of issues, and appropriately so." But today "neither (Palestinian leader Yasser) Arafat nor Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) has the capability of destroying the state of Israel... and we are no longer prepared to be silent in the face of this kind of insult and slap in the face."

Although apparently technical, the argument on conversions has practical significance because there is no such thing in Israel as civil marriage, divorce or burial. A Jew may be married here, for example, only by an Orthodox rabbi, and only to another person recorded in the Interior Ministry's population registry as a Jew. Tuesday's bill would give legal status for the first time to this Orthodox monopoly. It specifies that "there shall be no legal validity given to a conversion performed in Israel" without the approval of the Orthodox rabbinate.

Reform and Conservative conversions abroad would in theory continue to be recognized, but Orthodox parties have set their sights on those too.

Labor Minister Eliahu Yishai, one of two members of the ultra-Orthodox Shas Party in the cabinet, said in an interview that Shas would move next to close what he called loopholes in overseas conversions. "We, God forbid, are not interested in conflict, only bringing people together," he said, "but today the law is full of holes. A foreign worker can get a conversion from Cyprus by fax."

There is no evidence, in fact, of fax conversions or of several other alleged horror stories reported by Orthodox activists about Reform and Conservative movements. Even so, in practice the Interior Ministry— also controlled in this government by Shas— already is refusing to register Israelis who return from abroad with Reform or Conservative conversion certificates.

Beneath the power struggle was a basic debate on the legitimacy of Reform and Conservative Jewish practice, which are modest minorities in Israel.

The fundamentalist Jews of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish political parties argue openly that Reform and Conservative rabbis are not in fact Jewish but purveyors of a kind of religious fraud.

"Whosoever doesn't accept the one true Judaism, then let him not be a Jew," said David Tal, a Shas member of parliament. By offering a false substitute for the mandates of Orthodox religious law, he said.

"Reform and Conservative conversions are annihilating the people of Israel. It is a form of self-destruction, and we cannot allow this to happen."

Avraham Burg, who chairs the quasi-government Jewish Agency, which is dedicated to bringing Jews to Israel, and stands to lose tens of millions of dollars in revenue if American Jews go through with their boycott threat, said it was obvious that the Orthodox parties would use similar tactics later to take the bill through final passage into law.

Israelis cannot turn to American Jews "with requests for economic and political support," Burg said, and "simultaneously cut them off from the Jewish people and Israeli society."

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, said there is "a groundswell of anger and disaffection among American Jews" over Israeli leaders who "want to demean and denigrate the religious convictions of Conservative Jews, but say their money is kosher."

It was Schorsch's proposal to divert $100 million to $150 million in annual contributions to the United Jewish Appeal from Israel's government to Reform and Conservative synagogues in Israel and other institutions who "promote religious pluralism." ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

British Tories' message upstaged again by media revelations of scandal

By Fred Barbash

LONDON—Prime Minister John Major said last week that the general election campaign "may be long and may be tough but ... I'm going to enjoy almost every moment of it" The key word here is "almost," for it demonstrated that one of the world's more unflappable politicians is feeling frustrated, his spirits sagging, as well they might.

Indeed, there are signs that his Conservative Party's campaign is coming undone at its already frayed seams.

For the second consecutive week, the party's "message" was overwhelmed by the news media's preoccupation with scandal. This time a tabloid alleged that a thoroughly insignificant member of Parliament, Piers Merchant, was having an affair with a 17-year-old "Soho nightclub hostess" He denies it. She, in exchange for payment by the Sun newspaper, confirms it, in steamy detail.

But the truth is only semi-relevant, for it dominated a week that, like the last one, began with a faint glimmer of hope for the Tories, who remain at least 20 points behind the Labor Party in all the polls, and ended with everyone's writing and talking about sleaze.

Worse for the Conservatives, it ended with party figures, prominent and obscure, feuding with each other in public again. British voters may or may not care about the peccadilloes of a few members of Parliament. But it has been demonstrated repeatedly that they do care about a party leader's ability to steer a disciplined ship.

In the United States a presidential candidate is not generally expected to act as the whip for wayward members of Congress or congressional candidates. Congressional candidates and presidential candidates are independent operators.

Here, a party leader's ability to whip everyone into line is viewed as a test of political machismo, of capacity for leadership of the party and of the nation.

So there was the prime minister of Britain, not to mention the deputy prime minister, who called Merchant "an embarrassment," and the party chairman— the whole Central Office of the mighty Conservative Party—dropping strong public hints across the country that Merchant should step down as a candidate for the good of the party.

Meanwhile, a member of Major's cabinet, Defense Secretary Michael Portillo, who would like to replace Major as party leader if the Tories lose the May 1 election, was saying just the opposite—that Merchant should hang on—and then writing off his deviation from the party line to the fact that he hadn't yet heard what it was.

And here was Merchant, by now dubbed "Merchant of Sleaze," declining, at least for the moment, to go anywhere, except on a vacation, escaping surreptitiously for parts unknown under the eyes of a press mob keeping vigil at his home.

"To hell with Central Office," muttered Charlie Priest, a member of the committee that chooses Conservative parliamentary candidates in Merchant's district.

"If they won't back us, we won't back them," he told all the television cameras.

To make matters worse, Sir Teddy Taylor, another Conservative lawmaker, piped up to criticize the party's handling of sleaze in general. "I am in no doubt," he said to his own district stalwarts, "that the public are furious about the issue, that they feel let down and that they feel it has not been treated seriously enough" by the party.

It happened just when the Tories thought they had found an opening to expose the party now known as "New Labor" as Old Labor. The Labor Party promised Britain's trade unions that it would seek legislation similar to the US law guaranteeing collective-bargaining rights in shops where 50 percent of workers vote to be represented.

It wasn't much, but it was something, and the Tories lunged at it, rejiggering their entire campaign schedule to make the most of it, and for the first time putting Labor Party leader Tony Blair on the defensive.

But the Merchant affair shifted the spotlight back to the Conservatives, who now find no immediate salvation on the horizon. Negotiations broke down Thursday over a much heralded, presidential-style debate between Major and Blair when Blair's people walked out of the talks.

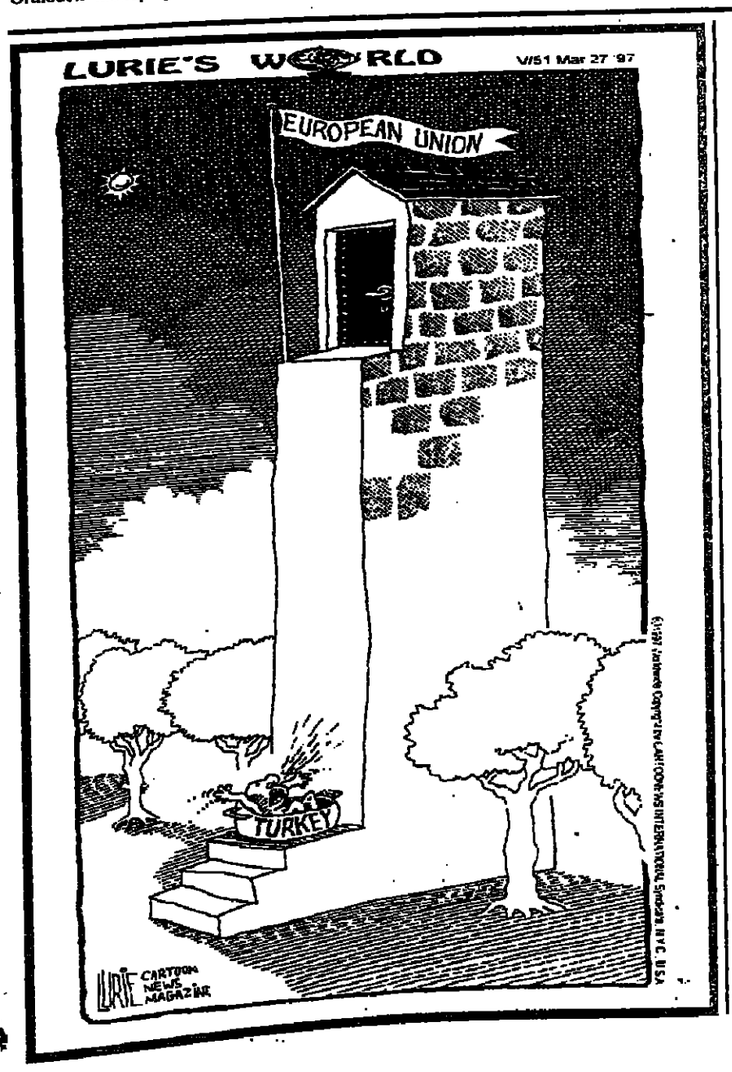
Conservative Party strategists regard such a debate, which would be a first here, as a last, best hope. Polls already show a steep decline in voters' regard for Major as "a capable leader" since the last election in 1992, and a sharp jump in the same category for the leader of the Labor Party, a role Blair assumed in 1994.

All this provides a mere taste of what was, for the Conservatives, a thoroughly rotten, week-long feast of horrors.

The other courses included a chorus of demands for the resignation of Neil Hamilton, a former Tory government minister and sitting legislator accused of accepting money for parliamentary favors; the departure of a second former minister and member of Parliament caught up in the same scandal; the resignation and nervous breakdown of a third ex-minister and Tory House of Commons member after newspaper allegations that he was having an affair; and finally, on Major's birthday Saturday, the abrupt announcement by the chairman of the Scottish Conservative Party citing "indiscretions" that might embarrass the party. ■

LA Times-Washington Post News Service





Last phase of European airlines' deregulation about to be completed

The Europeans deliberately chose a 10-year phase-in to avoid the bloodbath that accompanied American deregulation. In addition, European nations are unlikely to let their flag carriers fail regardless of how inefficient they are

By Anne Swardson

PARIS—Every morning at 7, a handful of sleepy passengers straggle across the tarmac at the airport in Bordeaux in France's southwest and board a plane headed for Marseille in the southeast.

All seems routine, but for one thing: On the tail of the plane is a depiction of a yellow-and-blue condor. The plane belongs to Lufthansa, the German airline, even though it is carrying mostly French passengers between French cities.

The last phase in a 10-year deregulation of European airlines will be complete Tuesday, and any European airline will be able to do what Lufthansa is doing—carry passengers anywhere they wish within the union. Until now, with some exceptions, one nation's airline could not pick up and deliver passengers within another nation. Lufthansa stole the march on its competitors by beginning the Bordeaux-Marseille service in January; it was legal because the flight goes on to Munich.

Europe has come a long way from the days when discounts were not permitted, changes in fares between countries had to be approved by both nations and airlines split, or "pooled," revenue from intra-European flights. Airline deregulation is one of many ways in which Europe is attempting to become competitive with its ally across the Atlantic, and it is one of the ways in which Europe, even before this last phase, has best succeeded.

Such airlines as British Airways PLC, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines NV and Deutsche Lufthansa AG are capitalist powerhouses. Some of those not yet ready for privatization, such as state-owned Air France and Alitalia SpA, also have slimmed down and cut costs. And a host of upstarts, offering low fares and few frills, have sprung up, particularly in the British Isles.

"We are about to plaster ourselves all over Europe," said Tim Jeans, commercial director for the young, Dublin-based Ryanair. In the next few months, Ryanair will expand to Paris-Dublin, Brussels-Dublin and London-Stockholm, without offering passengers so much as a peanut, he said.

Already, Ryanair's routes are attracting hundreds of thousands of people looking to save a pound. Round-trip between London and Dublin is $62, "less than you could spend in an evening at the pub," said Chris Avery, aviation analyst with Paribas Capital Markets in London.

The Europeans deliberately chose a 10-year phase-in to avoid the bloodbath that accompanied American deregulation. In addition, European nations are unlikely to let their flag carriers fail regardless of how inefficient they are. More likely, they will dwindle away to little more than transatlantic service, as some predict will happen to Alitalia. The failure rate for start-up airlines is expected to remain high, as it was in the United States.

Since the last phase of deregulation, in 1993, average fares have come down, competition on existing routes has increased and new routes have opened up, according to a study by the EU's European Commission. Europe also has felt the perils of the free market: Eighty new airline companies have been created, but only 20 have survived.

Despite all the changes of the last decade, analysts say the potential of deregulation to reduce fares and create new competition is limited, for several reasons:

■ The number of takeoffs and landings permitted at such major airports as London's Heathrow and Paris's Charles de Gaulle is limited, making it difficult for new airlines to gain access. Other airports, such as Amsterdam's Schiopol, limit airplane noise or the total number of passengers. Many new competitors fly to obscure, farther-out airports where costs are lower but connections are fewer.

■ Europe's multiplicity of air-traffic control systems—31 of them, to be exact— reduces capacity and efficiency.

■ Though the European Union has banned state subsidies to troubled airlines, some carriers keep coming back for more. Alitalia has a request pending for some $1 billion in Italian state aid that the EU in Brussels is expected to rule on in the next few weeks. From the point of view of privately owned carriers, the competition is still hardly fair.

"Theoretically we are in a liberal market but in practice we are not," said Thomas Kropp, general manager of European affairs for Lufthansa, the majority of which is owned by investors. "Unprofitable state-owned carriers have received more than $11 billion in state aid in the last five years. This is a big market distortion."

■ Europe's potential market for pleasure travelers is perceived as more limited than in the United States. Citizens of European nations are less likely to have friends or family in other European countries than Americans are to visit those in other US states, and trips within Europe are shorter and fully served by an excellent passenger rail system. And Europe's business air travelers still seem willing to pay full price.

Full international deregulation still is not on the horizon. Reason: service between European nations and other countries, such as the United States, is governed by bilateral treaties. Thus Lufthansa could not fly between Paris and Washington, nor could it own more than 49 percent of a carrier that does, because it is the France-US treaty that governs such service. ■

Kashmir bleeds as its people fight for self-determination

By Surinder Singh Oberoi

HAVING COVERED the uprising in my native Kashmir for eight years, I sometimes cannot believe I have had the good luck to remain alive.

Two years ago a stray bullet ricocheted through my office. Another time while I was covering a student demonstration, I stepped out of my car just as a bullet shattered the rear window.

More recently I was kidnapped. Last July I was one of 19 journalists traveling in a chartered bus to a press conference in southern Kashmir. At Anantnag, about 45 miles south of the Kashmiri capital of Srinagar, we were stopped by a dozen Kashmiri youths armed with AK-47s.

They ordered the bus driver to follow them and at gunpoint we were guided to a private home. Once inside we realized we were guests of the Jammu and Kashmir Ikhwan, or "Brotherhood," a counterinsurgent group funded by Indian security. Our captors complained that the local press—who they said was sympathetic to the separatists' cause—had ignored their orders to stop publishing. They told us that all coverage of the insurgency must stop.

Six local newsmen were moved to another part of the house and threatened with execution. The rest of us, all members of the national and international press, remained together. Our captors were so confident their demands would be met that they allowed me to use the telephone to tell my colleagues in the local press we had been kidnapped.

I called as many people as I could, including newsmen across Kashmir and government officials in Srinagar. I told the director of information for Kashmir that he was personally responsible for our safety, as government-backed militants were holding us hostage.

Our captors ordered my group to leave the house. They said their quarrel was with the local media, and we knew they did not want to risk international condemnation by harming journalists with a beyond-Kashmir audience.

But we refused. We would go nowhere unless the local newsmen were also freed.

Only after 10 horrifying hours, during which time we were repeatedly prodded with the barrels of automatic rifles, did pressure from journalists' organizations and orders from New Delhi persuade the Indian army to come to our aid.

When Indian troops surrounded the building, our captors threatened to open fire if the troops took any action. But once the militants realized they were outnumbered, they gave up. Not only was there no gun battle, no one was arrested. Our captors gleefully departed, unlicensed weapons in hand.

Our kidnapping was unusual not because of what happened — government-supported militants seizing members of the press and then walking away unmolested—but only because so many captives were involved.

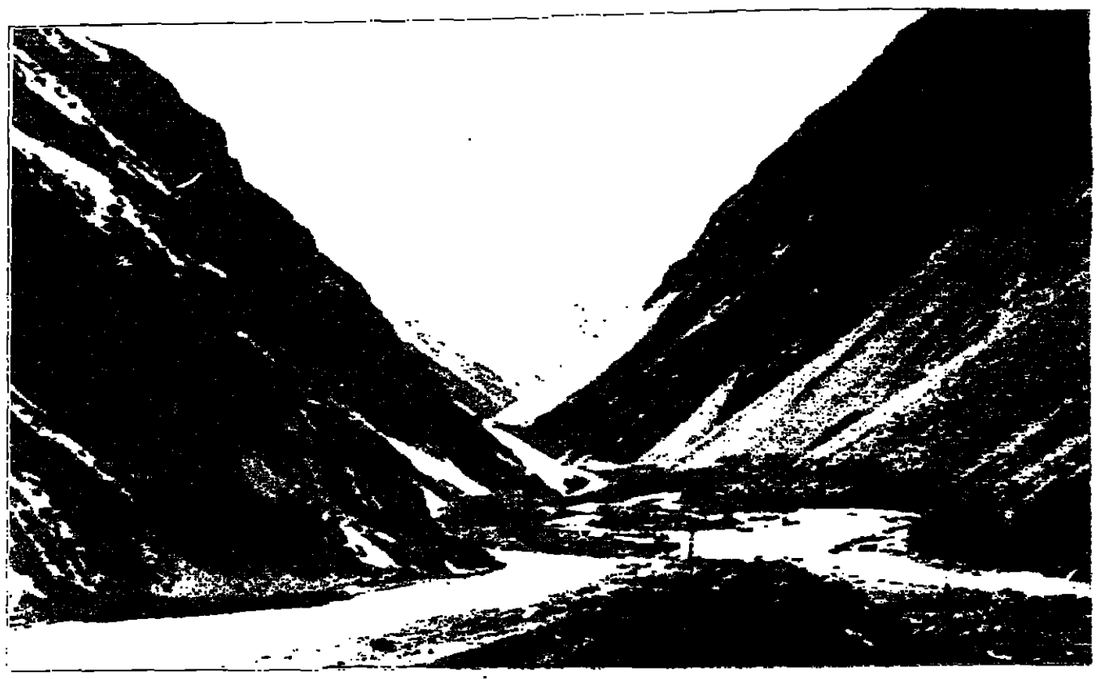
The truth is, kidnappings have become commonplace in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir since Muslim rebels began their most recent campaign against Indian rule in 1989. Over the years, at least 20,000 Kashmiris have perished by official count. Citizens continue to be abducted, tortured and killed by rebels, the Indian military and a network of government-backed counterinsurgents.

Of course, Kashmir was once a tourists' paradise. It has been known for centuries as the greenest and most temperate spot in the Himalayas—beautiful beyond imagination. Deep blue lakes reflect soaring, snow-capped mountains. Lush forests of fir, pine and spruce line the banks of rivers born in the high peaks.

Kashmir was once the summer refuge of the British raj as well as wealthy Indians escaping the blistering heat of the southern plains. With the advent of the tourist trade, the region only gained in popularity. Lavish brochures described breathtaking scenery and centuries-old shrines.

As recently as 1989, more than half a million Indian and foreign vacationers traveled to Kashmir to drift carefree on houseboats, or to ski, hike or fish the trout streams. Guides escorted visitors to famous landmarks, including the Mogul gardens of Nishat Bagh, the Mattan temples, Hari Parbath castle and Pahalgam, the hiker's mecca.

But Kashmir is prized for more than just its natural beauty. Wedged between Pakistan, India, China and Afghanistan, "greater Kashmir" (including both the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-controlled Azad Kashmir) sits squarely in the middle of a web of disputed borders.



Kashmir: Reputed to be one of the seven pillars of wisdom

The Kashmir valley is the passageway through the Himalayas to the entire subcontinent. From Kashmir flow the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum rivers, upon which Pakistan depends for water. As India's northernmost territory, the state of Jammu and Kashmir provides a valuable window on the other regional powers, including China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the nearby former Soviet republic of Tajikistan.

In the past 50 years, India and Pakistan have fought three wars—two over control of Kashmir. The issue has been on the United Nations docket as long or longer than any other—a UN military observer's office has monitored activities at the "line of control," the cease-fire line separating the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir, since the end of the first Indian-Pakistani war in 1947.

The cease-fire, which gave 65 percent of Kashmir to India, was to be temporary. A plebiscite was supposed to follow, allowing the Kashmiris to decide their future. To date, there has been no plebiscite.

Kashmiris today still want self-determination — which includes the opportunity not only to choose between India and Pakistan, but to opt for independence, which neither of Kashmir's dueling masters finds acceptable.

Pakistan favors a solution that implements a 1948 UN resolution giving Kashmiris the right to choose between the two countries. India prefers the "Simla agreement," signed in 1971 by Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which calls for India and Pakistan to resolve the issue bilaterally.

Meanwhile, border skirmishes are common—nearly 2,000 exchanges of fire took place in 1995. At the Siachin glacier, where the temperature remains below freezing all year, a pitched battle, the continuing occupation by the two armies and supply drops by helicopter have despoiled the once-pristine environment.

Efforts to re-start Indian-Pakistani negotiations have failed, and both countries have planted thousands of land mines at border crossings. As a result, hundreds of civilians living in border villages have died or been crippled.

The tourists' paradise has new landmarks—with names such as "martyrs' graveyard" or "site of a major massacre."

Streets and neighborhoods now bear the names of those killed fighting Indian troops. Luxury hotels have been turned into barracks. Gun-toting Indian soldiers in battle gear man sandbagged bunkers at nearly all major road intersections and important installations. Most of the government-owned eateries that once dotted the countryside have been torched.

The conflict is not limited to armed combatants, and recent incidents have specifically targeted the few vacationers who have come to Kashmir. Last summer six Indian tourists were killed at Lake Dal, allegedly by Muslim militants.

In a case that drew international attention, six Western hikers were kidnapped by the insurgent group Al Faran in the first week of July 1995. One of the captives, an American, escaped. Another, a Norwegian, was beheaded by his captors in August 1995. The remaining four are presumed dead.

The Indian government claims that Pakistan, with calls for Islamic unity, is recruiting Muslim mercenaries. Pakistan has denied the charge, saying that other Muslims feel it is their moral duty to help Kashmiri Muslims.

Already, hundreds of foreign mercenaries have joined the Kashmiri cause. Exact numbers are impossible to come by, but at least 200 foreign fighters have already been killed in assorted gun battles. At least 60 foreigners are in Indian jails. The majority are from Afghanistan and Pakistan, but there are scattered fighters from Sudan, Libya, Chechnya, Iran and other Islamic countries.

"Our boys are dying for the better future of Kashmir, and we are not that fool who will dance to others' tunes. We are holding the gun with full consciousness and will continue to fight till we achieve our goal of freedom," Majid Jehangir, divisional commander of the insurgent group Hizbul Mujahadeen, told me in a recent interview.

Kashmir's Muslim militants have tried to "internationalize" the Kashmir issue. In addition to kidnappings, they have relied on sieges at Kashmir's most revered and famous holy shrines to generate attention and sympathy for their cause.

In October 1994, two dozen Kashmiri militants occupied the famous marble Hazratbal (Home of the Prophet) Shrine in Srinagar, believed to house a strand of the Prophet Mohammed's beard.

The militants even threatened to blow up the building, and the local population took to the streets, demanding that security troops, who had ringed the shrine, be withdrawn. More than 50 demonstrators were killed by the paramilitary Border Security Forces when they tried to march on the shrine in a show of support for the militants.

The siege lasted a month, after which the militants surrendered. They were soon released by local police.

Another siege occurred in 1995, when militants and their followers occupied the shrine in Chrar-Sharief. Indian troops cordoned off the town. On May 7, in the midst of gun battles, fire broke out. Before it could be contained, 700 structures were gutted and the 17th-century carved-wood shrine was destroyed. In all, 30 people were killed—some by bullets, some by fire.

Then in March 1996, militants again took control of the Hazratbal Shrine. Although a gun battle took place and a police officer was killed, the militants negotiated a quick surrender and were allowed to exit the shrine still in possession of their weapons.

But authorities began to worry that the group was going to change sides and support Pakistan. Two days after their surrender, 30 militants were rounded up and executed.

Human-rights organizations have highlighted incidents in which troops have wantonly killed militants or their sympathizers. In fact, Amnesty International has stated that "torture by security forces is a daily routine and so brutal that hundreds have died as a result."

Amnesty warns that "the entire civilian population is at risk. Torture includes beatings and electric shocks, hanging people upside down for many hours, crushing their legs with heavy rollers and burning parts of their bodies."

One common way of rounding up suspected "sympathizers" is a dangerous game of "cat and mouse." The "cats," as they are known in local jargon, are informers—captured militants whom the Indian security troops use against their former comrades in arms. The mice are any Kashmiris suspected of taking part in the insurgency.

A "crackdown" or cordon-and-search operation starts before sunrise. A neighborhood is sealed off and the residents awakened by the sound of a loudspeaker: "This neighborhood is under a cordon-and-search operation. All adult males must come out of their houses and assemble in the square."

I have been forced to play this game on three occasions. Sleepy-eyed, I will hurriedly look for my slippers and in my nightclothes join the ever-increasing queue of men herded near the burned-down cinema. My press card will be of no help.

The assembled crowd grows silent. I see people reciting verses from the Holy Koran as the fear they might be arrested grows. Those who have been assembled are made to parade one by one past a half-dozen vehicles with tinted glass windows, behind which sit shadowy militants-turned-informers making identifications.

On one occasion, three teenagers were arrested in front of me and taken to an unknown destination.

These crackdowns, in which nearly every Kashmiri male between the ages of 15 and 35 has been paraded at least once in front of the dreaded cats, have on occasion turned into gun battles. At least four to six cordon-and-search operations take place every day.

No one can fully fathom the trauma to the 8 million Kashmiris, living for years now with gunfights between warring militant groups or between insurgents and counterinsurgent forces an everyday occurrence. A new generation is being brought up in the shadow of the gun, deprived of a normal social life, and often of education. More than 1,000 school buildings have been set ablaze. All the sports stadiums are closed.

Pakistan supplies money to the 30-odd militant and political organizations in the Kashmir valley. Meanwhile, India supports a half-dozen militant-turned-renegade groups to counter the insurgents. And about 250,000 soldiers are permanent tourists who buy nearly everything locally. By giving business to locals, the security troops make useful contacts and have more sources of information.

All the money that is coming in is used directly or indirectly by the Kashmiris. Before the uprising, a merchant who wanted to operate in a busy commercial center such as Lal-chowk (Red Square) in Srinagar had to pay a premium of $30,000 for the right to open a shop. Now that figure is close to $60,000. In a battle-ravaged state, one would expect rates to come down. But that is not the case.

In fact, the entire Kashmiri economy now depends on the presence of soldiers, insurgents and counterinsurgents to support the people. The building blocks of everyday life—farming, construction and education—have all been disrupted. Thousands of Kashmiris risk growing up with no skills other than fighting.

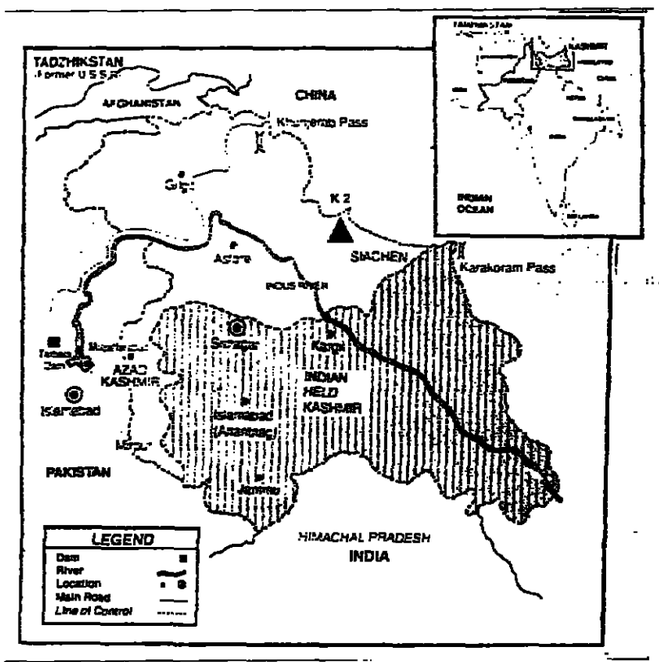
Despite the continuance of violence, the Indian government calls the elections, held in September 1996, a "victory of the ballot over the bullet." But the elections have done nothing to solve the Kashmir problem.

The elections became something of a farce in which, by manipulation, the Indian government was once more able to impose its chosen government. While claiming it was restoring the democratic process, India rejected all requests of foreign observers to monitor the elections.

And now New Delhi hopes that the administration will be able to bring peace, but with no plan for addressing the real needs of the people of Kashmir, the new government will probably fail to provide even a semblance of peace for Kashmir. ■

Surinder Singh Oberoi, who reports from Kashmir for Agence France Presse, was a fellow at The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, where a longer version of this article first appeared.

New York Times Syndication



An eventful month for the National Music Conservatory

AS PART of its cultural season for 1997, the National Music Conservatory of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation in cooperation with a number of embassies and cultural centers in Jordan will organize five activities during the month of April. These activities include Arab music, western classical music as well as a performance of the ever popular and entertaining Pantomime art.

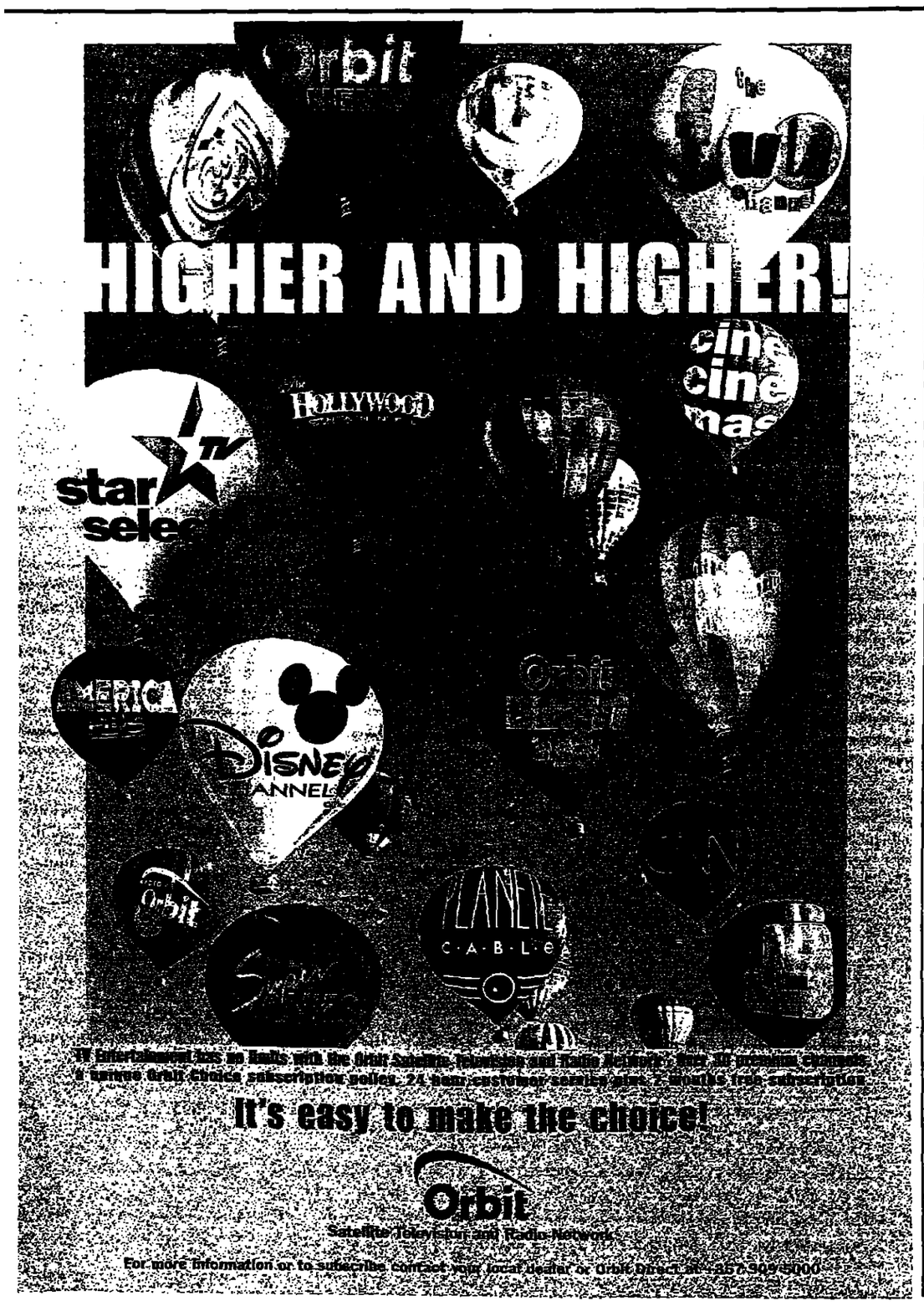
On Sunday, 6 April, Philadelphia Hall at Philadelphia Hotel will host the Egyptian Pianist Yasser Mokhtar in a piano recital. Mokhtar will perform pieces by Mozart, Chopin, Haydn, Schumann, Liszt and variations on an Egyptian Folk Song by Egyptian composer, Gamal Abdul Raheim.

The recital is held in cooperation with Royal Jordanian and Radisson SAS Hotel Amman. Mokhtar will make another appearance as he accompanies his compatriot, well-known soprano singer Neven Al-Louba, in a recital of songs by Marlene Dietrich and Zarah Leander.

The performance will be held, in cooperation with Royal Jordanian and Union Bank for Savings and Investment (UBSI), Monday, 7 April at 8:00 pm in the Auditorium of (UBSI).

Switching to a more tender tone, Spanish Guitarist Armando Orbon will perform a classical guitar concert featuring composition by Ramirez, Lauro, Grenet, Falu, Granados, Albeniz, Tarrega, De Falla and Rodrigo. The concert will be held in cooperation with Instituto Cervantes, Sunday, 14 April, at the Royal Cultural Center.

Under the patronage of the Mayor of Greater Amman Municipality, Dr Mammdouh Al Abbadi and on the occasion of 20th Anniversary of the passing of Abd Al Haleem Hafiz, Jordanian singer Atallah Hundaileh accompanied by the Arab Music Ensemble of the National Music Conservatory, will sing some of the most popular songs of the late Abd Al Haleem Hafiz. The concert will be held on Wednesday, 30 April at the City Hall—Amman Municipality. ■



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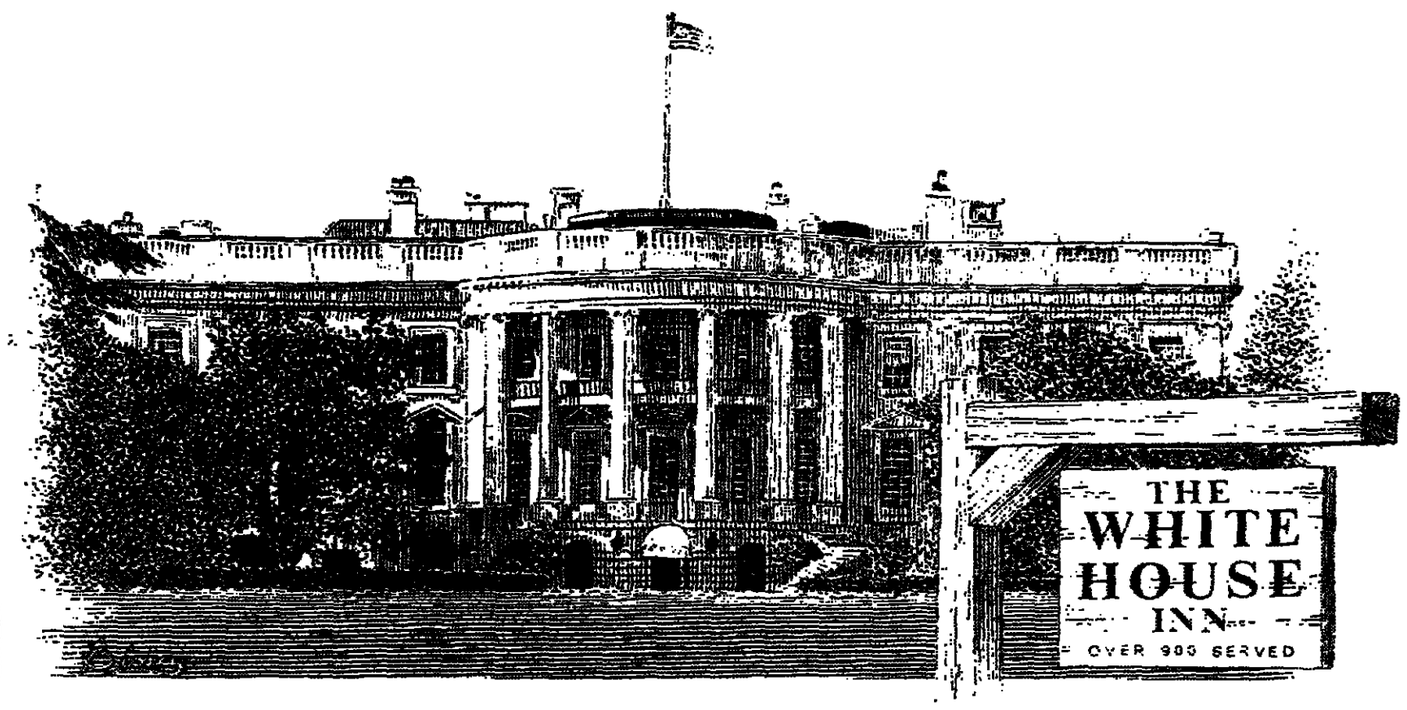
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To the public, a spectator sport

Corruption marches to the beat of its own drum

Nipping at the heels of globalization is a new, common awareness of corruption. But countries differ widely in their perceptions of what corruption really is—and how much they are willing to pay to get rid of it

By Hodding Carter

REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

WHEN IT COMES to the pervasive stench arising from the great dung heap of money that both smothers and nourishes contemporary American politics, it is hard to improve on the following observation:

"The real trouble with Washington in this modern era is that the money corruption pervades so many institutions and implicates so many figures of power that it is hard to find true allies of reform."

The words were written in mid-March by Robert Parry, onetime Associated Press and *Newsweek* investigative reporter, in his little Virginia-based biweekly, *The Media Consortium*. Parry is one of the last angry men in US journalism, but he uttered an unassailable truth.

The American people, their interests subordinated to those with the biggest checkbooks, offer the politicians a blank check of indifference

The amount of cash being solicited by and flung at American politicians is so staggering, the need for the money so great and the number of recipients so large that it will take a scandal of overwhelming proportions to make meaningful reform at the national level even remotely possible.

However, despite the fact that just such a scandal is poised on the near horizon, there is an even greater obstacle to significant change than the pervasiveness of big money in American politics. It is the people's apparent apathy about its existence. Public reaction to governmental misdeeds of any stripe has undergone a radical transformation over the past 25 years or so. The Gallic shrug has replaced outrage.

The polls are quite clear on this. The average American has low regard for most of his nation's major institutions, with particularly abysmal levels of trust granted to the presidency and to Congress. Having little faith to begin with, today's citizen professes to be unsurprised when new evidence is presented to validate his disdain.

This is not an original observation. Books, seminars, sermons and large

► OWN DRUM PAGE 2

Development held hostage

Political influence in the Philippines: 'Extracting wealth without effort'

By Eric Gutierrez

REPORTING FROM MANILA

FOR FILIPINOS, THE GOOD news today is that their country is Asia's latest economic tiger. The bad news is the tiger cub's growth may soon be stalled by an age-old problem that has crippled government and business—corruption.

Corruption in the Philippines is not a question of perceptions. It is a fact of life, one that everyone can see but nobody seems to be able to do anything about. Many believe corruption is the *raison d'être* for the country's political class. President Fidel V. Ramos himself said in 1992 that the economic system "rewards people who do not produce at the expense of those who do ... and enables those with political influence to extract wealth without effort from the economy."

But corruption in the Philippines is more than just the abuse of privilege or the monopoly of access to wealth. "The moral blight is not episodic or anecdotal: it is so comprehensive that it has developed into an entire culture of corruption," says Miriam Defensor-Santiago, a colorful anti-corruption crusader who almost won the presidency in 1992. "And the medium that diffuses this culture throughout society is politics itself," she continues.

"The moral blight is not episodic; it is so comprehensive that it has developed into an entire culture of corruption. And the medium that diffuses this culture throughout society is politics itself"

For years, scholars have tried to study and understand the phenomenon of corruption in the Philippines. But it is only recently that the literature has become more comprehensive according to professor Ledivina Carino, an authority on corruption studies. Researchers met many obstacles, like resistance from a government wary of having its faults exposed, to "certain behavior that are contrary to law but were supported by folk and even ethical norms."

Acts of corruption range from the petty, involving a few pesos to grease an inefficient bureaucracy, to the multi-billion peso deals involving the country's high and mighty. A recent casualty is government efforts at privatization and BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) schemes to raise money for development. For every major government asset or multi-billion project sold or awarded, a losing bidder or a third party will predictably cry foul.

Recently, the Senate leadership raised hell when the Public Estates Authority sold prime reclaimed land to the Amari Corporation for only 1.3 percent of its market value. Billions of pesos were allegedly pocketed by ruling party operatives and used for party candidates in the 1995 elections, says Senate President Ernesto Maceda.

Causing even more embarrassment was Ramos's reversal of a decision to award the operation of the Subic container terminal to Hutchison Whampoa Ltd. of Hong Kong. The losing bidder, International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI), protested because they offered the highest royalty payments to the government. But Hutchison won the bid, says Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority Chairman Dick Gordon, because ICTSI was poised to establish a monopoly over international container operations in Luzon. ICTSI operates both container terminals in the two other major ports, Manila and Batangas city. Observers wonder why simple bidding procedures could not be enforced.

More standard forms of corruption involving the spending of public money are also flourishing. A representative who has discretion over at least P12.5 million in the yearly public works budget often names the contractor to implement the project. It is an open secret that the kickback given for this consideration amounts to 10-20 percent of the project's cost.

Former Health Undersecretary Mario Taguiwalo discovered millions appropriated in the national budget for non-existent hospitals and health personnel. A Samar representative, Jose Ramirez, has been charged with appropriating funds for a private foundation that he himself heads.

More revenues are being lost in front-line revenue-collecting agencies. For instance, the Philippine Institute of Development Studies estimates that actual collection of direct and indirect taxes "is only about one-third of potential revenues." Other studies put the amount lost to tax evasion at P50 billion yearly.

Even petty forms of corruption take their toll. For instance, a small but popular disco joint in Quezon City which violated building and safety codes was given a permit to operate by local government executives headed by Mayor Ismael Mathay. In April 1996, more than 140 students celebrating their graduation and school year's end were burned to death in a fire that engulfed the dance club.

One comprehensive study of corruption in the Philippines is being directed by University of Wisconsin professor Paul Hutchcroft.

In Hutchcroft's opinion, "Cronyism"—deposed President Ferdinand Marcos's attempt to centralize the distribution of privileges—had little to do with development objectives. Hence, the disastrous impact on the economy of the Philippines during the dictatorship years. Corruption also "debilitates the capacity of the state to conduct important tasks to promote development," he writes.

Carino advocates that studies on corruption should not only show "how rotten politics in the country has been, but also draw attention to the standards [that should be attained] and lead the way through the use of exemplars in public service."

Hutchcroft agrees. "The most important tasks ahead are not so much in the economic as in the political realm," he writes. "Concerted attention to bureaucratic, political, and judicial reforms will be necessary to ensure that whatever politics of privilege emerge in the future, they will have a far less detrimental impact on Philippine development than those of the past."

ERIC GUTIERREZ IS RESEARCH DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY, A MANILA-BASED THINK TANK SPECIALIZING IN POLITICAL ISSUES.

Economic shock opens people's eyes—including those of junior civil servants

Jordan's scapegoat eludes pursuers

By Osama El-Sherif

REPORTING FROM AMMAN

In the good old days, 15 or 20 years ago, Jordanians could afford to pat themselves on the back for having one of the most corruption-free bureaucracies in the Middle East, if not the world.

Back then Jordan had a strong local currency (one dinar fetched US$3 until 1988) and received hundreds of millions of dollars annually in Arab and foreign aid. The country was firmly governed by way of a constitutional monarchy that saw no need for democratic politics.

Bribing a civil servant or pilfering money from public funds were unheard of then—and even if cases of corruption existed in government, the press thought twice before talking about it. Government had an aura of respectability about it and a civil servant, no matter how junior, would shrink from compromising his position by getting involved in shady deals.

Today, the cost of living is three times as much as it was back in the late 1980s. The value of the dinar has been halved—gravely depressing people's purchasing power—and unemployment is more than 20 percent (for a country of 4 million people).

But unlike a decade or so ago, Jordanians live in a democracy, which means elected deputies and a relatively free press. With these changes, corruption has become an extremely visible issue.

When people rioted in 1989 against hikes in the price of food, King Hussein ordered that democratic life—suspended in the 1950s—be restored. With an elected parliament in session, deputies blamed public mismanagement and official corruption for the country's misfortunes. Who was behind the dinar debacle? Where did the Central Bank's gold reserves go? How did we accumulate a $6 billion foreign debt? And who benefited from fat government deals?

All of a sudden administrative corruption became a household word in Jordan. People and the press talked about huge, illegal deals that involved senior government officials, ministers and even prime ministers. But it proved to be a storm in tea-cup. In the end a special parliamentary committee pinpointed a few cases and referred them to the public prosecutor. A former undersecretary at the Ministry of Supply was convicted for his role in a sugar and rice deal, after which the so-called corruption files were abruptly closed. People, who now perceive corruption everywhere, spoke of external pressure to muzzle the deputies, who were led by a powerful Islamic bloc.

Today the press talks about corruption—but not at senior levels. Under pressure to reopen the corruption files, the government compromised and said it was waging a war to fight corruption in government. In March of last year it formed an anti-corruption squad headed by General Samih Benoa from the General Intelligence Department, the most feared and respected special police agency in Jordan.

Since it was formed, the squad has made a number of arrests in the lower echelons of government. The public was amused, but not satisfied. It is still looking for the big catch, for a scapegoat to justify the prolonged recession and a frustrating economic situation.

Benoa believes he is doing a good job. Last year he held an unprecedented press conference in which he talked about the unit's achievements since it was created. The catch was not very impressive; 27 cases of smuggling, 16 cases of bribery, 17 cases of forgery and five cases of embezzlement. No big

► SCAPEGOAT PAGE 2

A LINE IN THE SAND, WESTERN STYLE

Corruption, as defined by Webster's dictionary

corruption \kə-'rəp-shən\ *n* (14c) **1** a: impairment of integrity, virtue, or moral principle : b: inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means (as bribery) c: a departure from the original or from what is pure or correct **2** *archaic:* an agency or influence that corrupts.

CLOUDED VISION

OWN DRUM

Continued from page 1

foundation grants have been sparked by the public's long descent into pessimism and world-weary resignation. The most popular theory is that the steady battering of social change and upheaval, the loss of the Vietnam war, the self-destruction of Richard Nixon's presidency and a quarter century of inexorable economic polarization have been a lethal combination. Confused, angry and depressed, the American people have decided that the institutions designed to serve their interests are, instead, subverting them—or so goes this explanation.

To which something else needs to be added. The post World War II baby boomers, that vast population cohort which dominates the country's demographic profile, suffered more than most from the ingestion of bad history in their schools and homes. The notion of American exceptionalism—that this was the new Eden—was given added weight by victory in the "last good war" and the protracted struggle against the forces of "international communism."

Having learned little of the realities of America's past, with all its checkered policies and practices, the Boomers were ripe for what can only be described as a typically adolescent reaction when they learned that the national portrait featured warts as well as beauty spots. Having first embraced uncritical faith, many of these boomers cycled with equal zeal toward uncritical disillusionment. If our institutions were not perfect, then they were bad. The New Left of the late 1960s and



early 1970s spelled Amerika with a "K" to make their point. Their less ideological contemporaries have slowly but steadily put on the self-protective mantle of cynicism to make theirs.

That is why extraordinary excesses of the Clinton campaign's money machine and the unfolding revelations about abuses of so-called "soft money" by Republicans and Democrats have yet to produce a combustible mass in US public opinion. Two decades of creeping tolerance of the previously intolerable as "that's the way it is" are not easily reversed. Old World "realism" has not totally supplanted New World idealism on the American cultural totem pole, but it has come a long way off the ground.

What can or will change it? Monumental, earth-shattering legal retribution. Special prosecutors bringing indictments and winning verdicts against people who stood next to President Clinton himself. Congressmen of both parties being hauled into court to account for the acceptance of funds from foreign governments. In short, a 1997 version of Watergate.

Barring that kind of cataclysm which is possible but unlikely, Parry's verdict is likely to stand. The money culture reigns and rules Washington, while the American people, their interests subordinated to those with the biggest checkbooks, offer the politicians a blank check of indifference. ◍

HODDING CARTER, A FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS IN THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION, IS AN ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF *The WorldPaper*.

How to finance good government

BY CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATES, the drugs trade could launder an accumulated US$3 trillion within 10 years—roughly twice the value of the world's stock of gold. By 1992, just two of the major criminal syndicates—Cosa Nostra and the Medellin cartel—were laundering $500 billion a year. This money can be flipped around the world, most of it forever offshore, beyond the reach of national governments. One of the most successful offshore banking centers, the Cayman Islands, manages more money than the private banks in any of the world's leading financial centers—some $600 billion.

With the enormous untaxed financial resources controlled by the drug barons and their crime cartels, they wield pernicious power to bribe and influence politicians and law-enforcement officials worldwide.

The conclusion is fearful: much of the world's future supply of investment capital will be controlled by people whose businesses depend on the widespread use of corruption and intimidation. In many developing countries this criminal culture is already a reality. The misuse of public power for private profit is the single greatest cause of "negative growth" in Third World nations. Zaire and Nigeria have far greater natural resources than most of the Far East's so-called "Tiger" economies, yet corrupt leaders have brought these large and once-vigorous African countries to their knees.

The process has been intensified by rich First World establishments—bankers, lawyers, government officials—eager to make crooked money straight by offering access for a fee of up to 25 percent to convert these funds into legitimate investable funds.

Crime is not the only thing fueling this trend. Over the past 50 years, over $300 billion has been transferred by the World Bank alone from what used to be called the First World to the Third. In all too many cases, the effect has been exactly the opposite of the intention. Poorer nations have become aid junkies, craving more, achieving less, their aid debts increasing beyond any hope of repayment, their economies spiraling downwards, while their elites have seized much of the aid and the resources.

Until recently, there seemed to be no way out. Both poor nations and the major donor, the World Bank, were trapped by the Bank's charter, according to which it must charge interest and must also demand full repayment of its loans. Strict adherence to the World Bank charter merely pushes the poorest, worst-administered debtor nations downwards into the pit of economic perdition. Something must change.

The World Bank has often declared that it wishes to encourage all clients worldwide to exercise "good governance." Such exhortations were about as much use as whispering in a gale. "Good governance" was precisely what dozens of Third World client states—or rather their ruling elites—did not want, declaring that it amounted to neo-imperialism.

But the World Bank's stated intentions opened the way for new thinking, and to a simple idea: that "good governance" should mean accountability in exchange for debt relief. It is this idea that President Museveni of Uganda has adopted. Over the next 20 years such accountability should lead to the cancellation of a significant part of Uganda's foreign debt. Should a future government reject Museveni's adherence to transparency and accountability, the unexpired portion of debt could be re-imposed.

One country is not the world, and managing aid tightly does not eradicate all criminal corruption. But it should be a start, a change signaling that the era of cynically corrupt elites is nearing its end. ◍

BY KARL ZIEGLER, THE DIRECTOR OF THE LONDON-BASED CENTER FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEBT RELIEF.

Why fight with your own history?

In Latin America, red cape cloaks sins of both public and private sectors

By Benjamin Ortiz Brennan

REPORTING FROM QUITO

CORRUPTION IS RAMPANT on both of the American continents, though it leaves a different stain on the cultural fabric of Latin American countries. Latin America has been unable to separate public and private affairs, a mixture that in North America is perceived as inevitably leading to corruption.

In colonial days, the Spanish monarchs issued fair—and even wise—laws in defense of the natives, but these laws were largely ignored. This attitude towards the law survives today. In Latin America those with the proper connections can sidestep the consequences of clear cut cases of tax evasion, even cases of fraud involving public funds.

In one recent example, Abdalá Bucaram and his sister lost the mayorship of Guayaquil, a position that each had won in different elections, for allegedly conducting shady businesses with the Ecuadorian city's public funds. Later on, political "friends" in the justice department obtained their amnesty and pardon.

Economic corruption in Latin America is everywhere. Private bankers tend to become directors of central banks and government organizations in charge of monetary and credit policies. No one cares if there is a conflict of interests. Corruption has blossomed in this overlapping of personal business and public policy, and in the past many reaped the benefits of currency devaluation. Nowadays, however, money is being made corrupting the privatization process.

Lower down the social ladder, poverty and social inequality often serve as an excuse to exculpate policemen south of the Rio Grande who accept a bribe. These petty, day-to-day activities add up, however, to large international smuggling rings such as the one operated by Pedro Pinto in Panama. Pedro Pinto, an Ecuadorian industrialist, liked to say that Panama is to the economy what Libya is to politics.





Nepotism is another form of corruption that flourishes, in part because few people see anything remarkable about it. Abdalá Bucaram, the populist of Lebanese descent recently ousted from the Ecuadorian presidency, ran an administration in which his brothers held public office and relatives enjoyed prominent positions in ministries, embassies and consulates.

While Bucaram was accused of nepotism during moments of crisis, that was not the reason for his downfall. In South American countries relatives are a natural part of the ruling entourage, and even though there are complaints, their presence is not seen as a sign of corruption. While the US is generally seen as far less corrupt, there are aspects of its government that South Americans do not respect. Washington, D.C., for instance, is filled with the offices of lobbyists whose job is to defend and represent the diverse interest groups that wish to influence the US Congress—and government in general—in exchange for a fee paid by the client.

This "lobbying," a concept that non-American cultures have trouble understanding, is a legitimate and honorable American institution. Nevertheless, in most Latin American countries lobbying would be considered almost dishonest. While the same behavior exists in South America, it is not regulated and is considered corrupt by politicians, the "candidates of the poor," who offer no explanations about the source of the millions of dollars they spend during their electoral campaigns.

Nor will they be asked. Latin America is a continent of volatile memory, where rulers once expelled by public outrage have returned to power. ◍

BENJAMIN ORTIZ BRENNAN IS EDITOR OF *Hoy*, A DAILY NEWSPAPER BASED IN QUITO, ECUADOR.

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SCAPEGOAT

Continued from Page 1

names. He said he was investigating a director of a public department who allegedly appointed 300 relatives!

Meanwhile, the anti-corruption squad recently cracked a case where customs officials were forging duty statements on luxury imported cars. In one case 230 fils (about 32 cents) was levied on a brand new Mercedes car. Investigators believe the culprits pilfered more than $1 million in customs duty revenue that is unaccounted for.

Now stories of corruption—appointing relatives, bribing officials and embezzling funds—are so routine the government is used to it. So little is done

One observer of domestic Jordanian politics argues that the drop in real wages and a rise in the cost of living is forcing junior civil servants into the kind of corruption previously reserved for senior public officials. Furthermore, he argues that before the advent of democracy, if the press even hinted at possible corruption the government would either punish the paper or launch an investigation to put its house in order. But now stories of corruption—appointing relatives, bribing officials and embezzling funds—are so routine the government is used to it. So little is done.

To deal with the corruption phenomenon, the government has tried to launch administrative reform; namely limit its hiring of new public servants and modernize its laws and regulations. That was two years ago.

Early in March, King Hussein sent a letter to his prime minister. "I support the efforts of all Jordanians who loathe bureaucracy and its crippling effect on the state apparatus," the king said. He suggested that "those who are a surplus to public administration's needs, those who do not work day and night, they should stay at home, receive salaries or compensations for their past services until they can find a suitable occupation outside the framework of the administration..."

But with the public sector, including the military, hiring over 50 percent of Jordan's workforce, trimming the size of government, and getting rid of corruption, is unlikely to be an easy job. ◍

OSAMA EL-SHERIF IS THE EDITOR OF *The Star*, AN AMMAN-BASED WEEKLY NEWSPAPER, AND *The WorldPaper's* ASSOCIATE EDITOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST.

THE WORLD PAPER

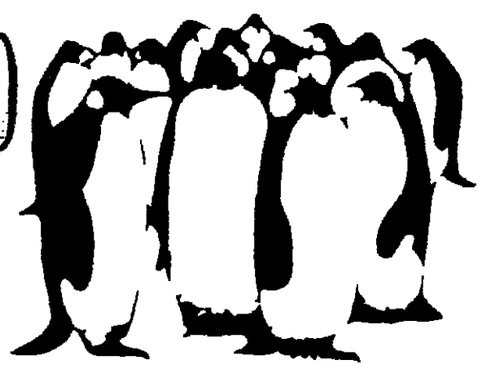
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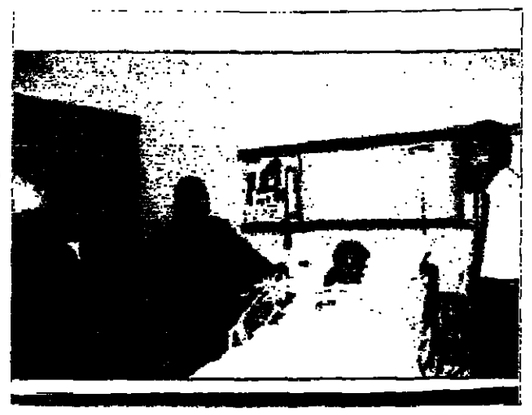
هكذا من الأصل

AROUND TOWN



Congratulations

● *Their Royal Highness Prince Faisal and Princess Alia were blessed with twin baby girls last Thursday. Their Royal Highness Prince Hassan and Princess Servath, Prince Rashed and Princess Badia visited last Friday Princess Alia and the twin baby girls, Sarah and Aisha at Al Hussain Medical Center.*



The stage

A priveleged place for universal communication

By Anca de Maio
Special to The Star

Within the framework of the Festival of Independent Theater Troupes currently taking place in Amman, last Tuesday night's fabulous impromptu show by an ad hoc grouping of French, Jordanian and Egyptian professional actors was a moving and entertaining example of perfect intercultural communication.

The purpose of the festival to cause Arab independent troupes *'to meet' similar groups* from all over the world has been fully reached in the four-day workshop that prepared Tuesday *night's show* 'The Encounter' under the direction of **Michele Guigon**, the head of the French 'Compagnie du Pitit Matin.'

"It was a wonderful experience to meet, work and communicate with Arab actors in the universal language of the theatre," Mrs Guigon said. "It is the first time we come to Jordan and to the Arab World and I am happy we could participate in this young international festival in an interactive way and not as simple interpreters of a given dramatic text," she continued. "When **Hassan Geretli**, the Egyptian co-organizer of the *manifestation in cooperation with the Jordanian* 'Al Fawanees' invited us, the idea of a workshop attracted me most," she pointed out.

"La compagnie du Pitit Matin," whose 25 members gather regularly but work on an offer and demand basis, is a troupe that step on stage as complete actors. They act, sing, dance, perform in pantomime, magic and acrobatics refusing the 'oppression' of any written text.

"Though we do play theater plays, the 'cabaret' is our favourite formula, as it allows us to combine different types of stage art in one show," Guigon explained, adding that she requires all the actors of her troupe to *have at least two functions*: actor, singer, instrument-player, acrobat, juggler, etc. "On the occasion of this workshop, the fact that we believe more in other ways of expression than words proved correct and useful," she said.

Only six actors and a technician of the French group came to Jordan. "We had no idea what *the show would be like*, but we betted that in four days there would be a show; we were in a way prepared to put together some sketches and songs from our repertory alone and improvise our own show in case the cooperation with the Egyptian 'Al Warsha' and the Jordanian troups 'Masrah Al Masrah' and 'Mawal' had failed," Guigon continued.

"Together with the six Jordanian and two Egyptian actors that worked with us seven hours a day during the last four days we invented the show by simply telling the story of their encounter: the arrival of French actors at a Jordanian festival of all stage arts (circus performances included), their first contact and communication attempts ('Ismi Pierre/Ismi Said'), their auditions as singers, clowns, magicians and pantomimists before the local organizer embodied by the Egyptian actress **Vania Exergian**, and the final dance *in which all actors expressed their joy of* being together on stage.



The context of a festival linked the *sequence of numbers and gave coherence to* the show that also included several sketches on the theme of linguistic and behavioral communication (or rather miscommunication) between different nationalities and cultures, men and women, etc. An absolutely original definition of 'bilingualism' and even 'trilingualism' was given by the pantomimist Guigon and her accordion. Two wordless but convincing love declarations expressing two contrasting cultural or temperamental attitudes were mimed by **Sahar Khalifa** ('Masrah al Masrah') and **Patrick Dray** ('Pitit Matin'), and stifled by **Rina Al Khoury** ('Masrah al Masrah') and **Pierre Giraud**('Pitit Matin'), respectively. To the end a comic chain of relational misunderstandings showed how one' reactions could be influenced by previous experiences

Subtle serious nuances hinting for one *second to social, racial and historical realities* counterpointed here and there the scenes of clownish humor that made the public roar with laughter. The sober exile Palestinian song so movingly interpreted by Khalifa thrilled the audience. Nevertheless the general atmosphere of fun and entertainment was restored immediately by the appearance on the stage of the magician clowns 'Milos and Bioulous' *acted by* **Mauro** Cuceano and Dray.

"The common thing between the French and Arab actors of this show is that either of us can do without words on stage," said Khoury. "The language is not a problem at all It is true that **Vania** was the one that interpreted when really needed, but otherwise we just let ourselves communicate our feelings and states of mind," she explained. "It was extremely interesting to participate in such a workshop—not technical and yet so useful and so enriching," she commented

"It was a pleasure for me to work with different persons from different groups," said Giraud. "Finding a common style out of this variety of approaches and reactions was challenging but successful," he added. "It seems that the Arab actors that we brought together appreciated to work with their co-nationals *from other troupes too and not only with us*", he continued pointing out that, if the Jordanian actors apparently happen to work with the same directors, they seldom have the opportunity to perform together.

"Personally I am very proud to participate in this festival and we promise to come back next year to sing and dance with our Arab colleagues," Dray confessed. "They are wonderful and easy to work with," said **Meriem Menant**. "They understand and learn quickly in a natural and open manner that—I have to admit—many would-be cerebral' French actors lack completely", she stressed. "For sure the philosophy of Arab actors is much more human and more productive," she added.

"The public's responsiveness impressed us and we are happy to have managed to go beyond all possible communication frontiers," underlined Guigon. "One asks something in Arabic and gets the answer in French—*ma fih moushekele!*", she said.

Thunderous applause broke again and again between the numbers, risking sometimes to affect the rhythm of the show. The exuberance of the Jordanian public denoted high receptivity to this type of performance and satisfaction to witness such a fruitful *intercultural artistic manifestation.*

The participation in the current festival of the French 'Compagnie du Pitit Matin' as well as of the French troupe 'L'Emergumene" was supported by the French Cultural Center and the French Embassy in Amman. ■

African art displayed in Amman



THE FIRST sale exhibition in Jordan displaying African Ceramics items from Egypt, Sudan and South Africa opened Tuesday at the *premises of the* Al Beit Furniture Establishment in Mecca street.

The Jordanian public is offered a wide choice of pottery objects, lamps and statues in original forms, designs and colors, big ornamental pots for indoors plants representing the result of the collective work of seven Egyptian craftsmen, elegant vases *in Islamic* style or in geometrical Coptic tradition, mat and bright dark-coloured ash-trays, mugs and cups, refined lamp stands with andromorphic motifs (South Africa) or Arabic calligraphy patterns (Sudan), monochromic statues embodying such characters as musicians, shoes-polishers, narghile-smokers etc, made by deaf and dumb handicapped persons from an Egyptian village.

The effort of buying, transporting and displaying the *almost* 1000 pieces of the exhibition (400 big items and more than 500 small ones) has been made by Mrs **Nadrine Sherif**, a person of good taste, selective sense and cultural experience. After leaving Kuwait together with her family five years ago, she moved to *Cairo and started* to travel and discover the beauties of Egyptian and Sudanese ceramics. She decided to try to introduce them to the Jordanian public and test their responsiveness to *these new styles.*

"The exhibition appeals to a large variety of tastes," said the painter and advertiser **Sabah Hadidi**, "and I can already say that it is very successful."

"The people that have come to the opening liked the pieces and have already bought a great many."

The exhibition will running until 10 of April. ■

AD

SCRAPBOOK

By Christian Doumit

Beirut revisited

AFTER AN interlude of 10 years, I decided to revisit Beirut. We *stayed in a nice old house in* Ayn Mraysse that is in danger of demolition. **David Hirst**, our host—just back from Iran—is an eminent journalist who has lived in Beirut for more than 30 years. Daoud as we like to call him among friends—has risked shrapnel and exploding bombs in the course of duty and is an exemplary English gentleman, cultivated, upright, and humane, who feels equally at home sipping Armagnac and listening to **Monteverdi** or being at the war front.

The first time I visited him in Beirut was in the late seventies on the occasion of his 'Resurrection Party'. He had gone missing in action in South Lebanon—after a heavy Israeli bombardment—and was later 'kidnapped' by the Israelis. And there he was in Tel Aviv, sans passport, trying to explain to an incredulous British Embassy official how he got into Israel (courtesy of the Israeli Army), why he couldn't go back the way he got in (there was a war going on), and why he needed a *replacement* travel document to get him to Cyprus and back to Lebanon (his passport and briefcase were destroyed in the bombardment). And finally, there we were at the Mother of all Bashes celebrating his safe return...

As we were reminiscing about the good old days, we were *joined by* Saleh, a former militia leader in West Beirut—now turned fisherman—and **Julie Flint**—formerly a *Guardian* correspondent—who recently reinvented herself as a TV producer. Saleh owns a small fishing boat anchored in that picturesque little port in Ayn Mraysse—next to the old US Embassy. With construction going on and land being reclaimed to make room for a horrendous building—Saleh may soon find himself working as a gondolier for rich Gulfies now buying $3 million flats in the 'House of Dreams,' where the owners could have their cars lifted and parked in front of their apartments. This was quite an evening. The fish that Saleh had provided was delicious and so was the Kefraya Chateau.

The next morning while strolling on what once was the fashionable Hamra Street, my wife and I run into one of our best friends in Amman. **Azmi Tubbeh** and I are often running into each other in places such as Frankfurt or Muscat and here we were on Hamra Street gaping in horror at what used to be the Express and Horseshoe. The former has been turned into a Pizza Hut and the latter into a third world fast food variety. We ended up at the "Duke of Wellington" where we demolished a few pints of Guinness before heading for the "Blue Note" for dinner.

There were beautiful girls everywhere, Come to think of it, Lebanese girls really looked after themselves and were incredibly smart and well-dressed, lots of charm *bracelets, lipstick which never smudged—became of* course, they were never kissed. Most of them carried a cellular phone but this did not prevent them from looking at us smiling and flirting. Only someone who knew the meaning of temptation could speak thus. Some of them smoked and Azmi tells me that women who smoke tend to be more promiscuous than others, something to do with nerves, but which ones? Or, perhaps it is the after effects of war and liberation which make Lebanon a ripe hunting ground.

Trying not to eat and drink at the "Blue Note" or *almost any other place in Beirut is almost impossible*—because of the food and wine people serve. Not exactly, Chinese take-away washed down with Diet Coke. Good *wine, like Kefraya red make some drink more and more* especially after the euphoria sets in.

But a real anti-climax came the next day when we drove to Bhamdoun, Sofar and ended at the Palace of Beiteddin. The great court of the palace was empty when we arrived. The scenery around the palace of Beiteddin is conducive to merciless and sad thoughts. Precipitous ravines on all sides make the place gloomy and depressive. There is much splendour in Beiteddin, but it's also a reminder of the dark and cruel places of Lebanon, not its glory. Many tribal chiefs have been put to death and *many princes have had their eyes plucked out. This is* hardly the place where a hedonist like myself, a man who loves the soft and gentle sights of this world, would like to meet his last enemy. ■

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



"Little Bear! A watched head never gets eaten by ants."



The music of Abd Al Haleem lives on



Abdel Haleem

ABDEL HALEEM Hafiz still lives in the hearts and minds of people across the Arab world 20 years after his death. His undying music, enjoyed by young and old, lives on from generation to generation.

The songs of Abdel Haleem, known as the *Andaleeb Al Asmar* (the Tanned *Nightingale*), *portray his character and* continue to capture those people who were too young at the time to appreciate his music.

Today his records and cassettes occupy the top charts in the Arabic pop singles, only beaten in first place by the unforgettable Um Kalthoum.

***Last week the Arab world celebrated* the 20th anniversary of his death. Abdel Haleem died on 30 April 1977, at the age of 48, after a long battle with bilharzia, a disease which he had since he was a child. Doctors only managed to find a cure for the disease in 1984.**

Abdel Haleem has 248 songs to his name, these are still the highest selling in Egypt. In a survey conducted by Egyptian Radio, he was chosen as the best singer of 1996, this is 19 years after his death.

As evidence of his popularity, the Egyptian *Al Ahram* weekly, suggest that sales of his songs together with those of Um Kalthoum and Abdul Wahab are today recording a high 20 percent increase. Indeed, the weekly has dubbed these three as the "giants of Arabic music."

Abdel Halim never let the bilharzia affect him. In his early days, the younger singer was known as "the voice of the Egyptian revolution" during the Nasser era as he sang many nationalistic songs.

The choice of the topics that he sang imbued great jubilation and enthusiasm among the masses. He had just the right warm voice, the style and the almost mesmerizing approach to create an atmosphere that was full of vitality but romantic at the same time.

Later on he took his music to the cinema, when he started acting in films. There he proved that he was talented enough to take on the giants in the Egyptian cinema proving that he was just as versatile in acting as he was in his songs.

All in all, he acted in 16 films. Directors, producers and the people at large loved him for his compassion. Today, actors and singers alike appreciate the role he has in the Arab and the Egyptian art scene.

The famous Egyptian singer Amr Diab says that Abd Al Haleem's popularity is three times as much as mine and will remain so for the next 100 years.

Currently a film is being made about him. Ahmed Zaki, the Egyptian, who starred in the film Nasser '56 says that *the songs of Abd Al Haleem will continue* to serve as reference for the Nasser period. ■

Le Jourdain

Supplément en français du Star

L'Irak espére doubler ses exportations de pétrole

L'Irak a annoncé cette semaine qu'il souhaitait doubler ses exportations de brut lors du renouvellement de son accord avec l'Onu en mai, alors que la livraison des vivres achetés avec les recettes du pétrole s'accélère.

«Nous espérons que le Conseil de sécurité de l'Onu prendra en considération notre demande de doubler au moins (la quantité de pétrole exportée)», *a déclaré Amer Rachid, ministre irakien du Pétrole. Actuellement, cette quantité est fixée à deux milliards de dollars par semestre. Le général Rachid a indiqué qu'il espérait que le rapport présenté par le secrétaire général de l'Onu Kofi Annan (notre photo) en mai, au moment du renouvellement de l'accord, incluerait une recommendation de doubler les quantités de pétrole.*

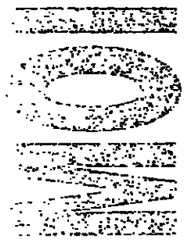
L'Irak a repris ses exportations de pétrole le 10 décembre, mais ce n'est que le 20 mars que les vivres achetés avec l'argent du pétrole ont commencé à arriver.

Un premier bateau chargé de 37.200 tonnes de blé français est arrivé lundi au port d'Oum Qasr et a été suivi d'un deuxième, battant pavillon turc, chargé de 29.162 tonnes de blé français.

Au total, quelque 90.000 tonnes de vivres sont arrivées en Irak depuis le 20 mars. Plus de 2,2 millions de tonnes de vivres doivent être importées au cours du semestre, conformément à l'accord «pétrole contre nourriture».



SELON



La femme a obtenu en Jordanie une victoire remarquable pendant les années de crise économique qui ont frappé le royaume hachémite à la fin des années 80. Elle a réussi à imposer à une société traditionnelle la nécessité du travail féminin pour la survie de la famille.

Aujourd'hui, le climat politique donne une nouvelle chance à la femme d'améliorer sa condition. Le rôle politique de celle-ci reste très limité, avec notamment une seule représentante à la Chambre des députés, et la préparation d'élections législatives prévues en novembre lui offre l'opportunité de revenir au centre de la scène politique.

Si l'on peut se réjouir de l'intérêt soudain manifesté par certains politiques pour la cause féminine, il est plutôt inquiétant de voir que sans crise économique importante ou échéance électorale cruciale, la société ne cherche pas à libérer la femme des conceptions archaïques qui l'oppriment depuis des décennies.

Les femmes ont besoin dans ce pays de beaucoup plus qu'un quota au parlement ou d'une décision ministérielle de nomination d'une ou plusieurs femmes au sein du gouvernement. Ces décisions vont certes dans la bonne voie, mais il est nécessaire de réformer la société d'une maniere plus importante.

Il est important de montrer dans notre système éducatif quel a été le rôle de la femme en Jordanie dans le domaine culturel ou intellectuel. Il faut non seulement aider les associations qui se battent pour améliorer la condition de la femme, mais aussi lutter au sein de toutes les institutions civiles pour que les femmes jouissent des mêmes droits que les hommes.

Les questions de représentation politique ne doivent par ailleurs pas occulter des problèmes de fond de la société jordanienne, tels que les crimes d'honneur et d'autres pratiques inhumaines dont souffrent les femmes dans ce pays. Ces coutumes encore tolérées engendrent la peur et l'angoisse permanente chez de nombreuses femmes et menacent de dominer leurs consciences pour encore de nombreuses décennies, freinant ainsi toute évolution de mentalité.

Le fait de dire que la société matriarcale était probablement plus harmonieuse peut sembler peu féministe. Mais selon l'écrivain égyptien Sayyed Qumni, la société matriarcale a été marquée par la domination de l'amour et de la paix. Il n'y avait ni guerre ni conflit lorsque la mère était chef de famille.

Il serait donc utile de réfléchir aujourd'hui à un autre système social. La guerre entre les sexes peut certes durer encore longtemps, un peu partout dans le monde et particulièrement en Jordanie. Mais il n'est pas impossible d'imaginer un monde où homme et femme gouverneraient ensemble.■

Sa'eda Kilani

Le Jourdain, on y revient. Tous les jeudis dans le Star

645 380

Eau

Un hiver pluvieux qui ne résout aucun problème

Grâce aux pluies abondantes de cet hiver, le royaume hachémite peut compter à l'approche de la saison chaude sur 25% de réserves d'eau supplémentaires par rapport à 1996. Cette bonne nouvelle ne doit cependant pas faire oublier la situation critique dans laquelle se trouve la Jordanie qui doit faire face à un besoin d'eau croissant.

Avec une pluviométrie d'environ 700 millions de mètres cubes d'eau par an, la Jordanie ne peut pas profiter de toute cette quantité d'eau. A cause de son climat quasi-tropical, la grande majorité de cette eau s'évapore, et l'on estime la réserve d'eau à seulement 10%. Un chiffre qui contribue à expliquer la situation critique que connaît la Jordanie dans le domaine de l'eau.

Pour cet été, la situation ne devait pas connaître une importante amélioration malgré les pluies abondantes qu'a connues le pays entre le 10 janvier et la fin du mois de mars. Les barrages principaux du pays sont remplis à 85%, soit 5% de plus que l'année précédente. L'Autorité jordanienne de l'eau estime en effet que les cinq plus grands barrages du pays contiennent environ 93 millions de mètres cubes d'eau, pour une capacité maximum de 110 millions de mètres cubes.

En plus de ces barrages, 14 petits barrages disséminés dans le pays apportent eux 20 millions de mètres cubes d'eau supplémentaires. «*Par rapport à 1996, on peut estimer que l'on dispose de 25% de plus d'eau à la sortie de l'hiver*», explique Zafer Alem, un des responsables de l'Autorité jordanienne de l'eau. «*Nous n'attendons pas que cette quantité supplémentaire couvre le déficit que connaît la Jordanie, mais elle devrait permettre de soulager un peu les nappes souterraines en les économisant un peu plus cette année.*»

Pour combler son déficit estimé à plus de 400 millions de mètres cubes par an, la Jordanie est en effet obligée de puiser un peu plus chaque année dans ses réserves non-renouvelables.

Pour palier cette situation de pénurie, la Jordanie n'a que deux alternatives: trouver de nouvelles ressources en eau ou réduire sa consommation. Suite à la signature du traité de paix avec Israël, une certaine quantité d'eau provenant notamment du Jourdain devrait revenir à la Jordanie. Mais ces transferts n'ont pas encore eu lieu (voir encadré).

L'accent doit être mis sur la réutilisation des eaux usées. Et quant aux projets d'usines de dessalement, ils sont encore dans les cartons, car jugés trop coûteux.

Un déficit doublé d'ici l'an 2000

C'est donc en économisant son eau que la Jordanie peut espérer réduire sa consommation. Le ministère de l'Eau et de l'Irrigation cherche de nouvelles solutions, notamment en limitant le gaspillage. Selon de récentes études, environ 60% de l'eau serait gâchés à cause de la vétusté du réseau de canalisations. «*Comme les nouvelles ressources sont difficiles à trouver, nous essayons tout d'abord de renouveler le système de canalisation afin de limiter les pertes*» explique Koussai Quouteishat, secrétaire général du ministère de l'Eau et de l'Irrigation.

La consommation des habitants se situe elle déjà à un niveau très bas, environ 200 mètres cubes par an par habitant, en comparaison avec le «minimum vital» de 1000 mètres cubes retenu comme critère international. Et elle devrait atteindre le chiffre de 50 mètres cubes d'ici une trentaine d'années. Depuis 1991 et le retour de 400.000 personnes chassées du Koweït, le royaume hachémite ne cesse en effet de faire face à une demande croissante.

Des projets de sensibilisation se développent dans le pays, notamment à l'initiative de l'Association jordannienne de l'environnement. Celle-ci a lancé une campagne d'information proposant des mesures concrètes pour économiser l'eau. «*Avec des réservoirs, on pourrait par exemple satisfaire les besoins domestiques de nombreuses familles*», explique Mohammed Ayesh, un des responsables de l'association.

Face à ce besoin croissant, la Jordanie doit aujourd'hui trouver de nouvelles solutions pour préserver son eau. Des secteurs comme le tourisme ou l'agriculture (65% de l'eau consommée en Jordanie) sont en effet très consommateurs, et leur développement ne va pas sans poser problème.

Or, la Jordanie sait qu'elle ne dispose que de très peu de temps. Selon de récentes études, le déficit en eau de la Jordanie devrait en effet augmenter de façon exponentielle dans les années à venir, et pourrait frôler les 1000 millions de mètres cubes en l'an 2000.■

Nahed al Khlouf



Koussai Quouteishat, secrétaire général du ministère de l'Eau et de l'Irrigation



La vétusté de certaines canalisations reste l'une des causes principales de gaspillage de l'eau en Jordanie.

Un traité de paix en attente

Suite au traité de paix signé en 1994 avec Israël, la Jordanie devrait bénéficier de volumes d'eau supplémentaires (environ 100 millions de mètres cubes par an), mais surtout, en connectant le système du King Abdallah canal avec le Lac de Tibériade, de marges de manœuvre plus grandes pour la gestion saisonnière de l'eau.

Selon le traité de paix, les premiers transferts d'eau entre les deux pays auraient déjà dû avoir lieu. En décembre dernier, Samir Kawar, alors ministre jordanien de l'Eau et de l'Irrigation, avait déclaré que «les négociations concernant les 50 millions d'eau potable avaient pris un an de retard», mais que la Jordanie faisait tout ce qu'elle pouvait pour récupérer cette eau promise. Il avait ensuite précisé que ce retard n'était pas dû à des raisons politiques, mais à des problèmes d'infrastructures ne permettant pas encore aux deux pays de s'échanger des quantités d'eau.■

Une stratégie mondiale de l'eau

Le premier Forum mondial de l'Eau qui a eu lieu fin mars à Marrakech s'est achevé sur un appel à la reconnaissance au droit de chacun à l'eau et à la mise en œuvre d'un processus qui débouchera en l'an 2000 sur la définition d'une stratégie mondiale de l'eau.

La déclaration de Marrakech recommande aussi la mise en place d'un «véritable mécanisme pour la gestion des eaux partagées, la protection des écosystèmes et une utilisation plus rationnelle de l'eau».

Ce premier forum, qui a rassemblé quelque 500 participants d'une soixantaine de pays, a mandaté le Conseil mondial de l'eau pour qu'il lance une vaste étude qui conduira à une «approche globale de l'eau, de la vie et de l'environnement au siècle prochain». Cette approche constituera une véritable méthodologie pour éviter la multiplication des crises régionales de l'eau qui pourraient déboucher sur une crise mondiale, ce que les experts craignent au plus haut point. Des propositions d'actions précises -à l'échelle régionale, continentale et mondiale- seront soumises lors du second forum prévu en l'an 2000 «aux dirigeants du monde pour faire face aux besoins des générations futures».

Plusieurs mesures ont d'ores et déjà été proposées à Marrakech «pour rectifier les erreurs du passé»: un changement d'attitude et d'approche pour la mise en valeur durable des ressources en eau, une évaluation des ressources en eau dans chaque pays et des campagnes d'informations sur les précautions à prendre pour protéger l'eau.

Les ressources en eau douce de la planète sont plus rares mais elles n'ont pas diminué. Elles sont moins disponibles parce que la consommation ne cesse de croître sous l'effet de la pression démographique et de l'irrigation. La pollution contribue elle aussi à la raréfaction de la ressource. Aujourd'hui, un habitant du monde sur cinq manque d'eau.■

Football

L'équipe jordanienne met le cap sur Paris

L'équipe jordanienne de football débutera mardi le premier tour des éliminatoires pour la Coupe du monde qui se déroulera en France en 1998. Elle est opposée au Bahreïn et aux Emirats arabes unis.

Les derniers résultats de l'équipe de football de Jordanie rendent les dirigeants de la Fédération jordanienne plutôt optimistes. En réalisant deux matchs nul (0-0) contre la Syrie, les joueurs ont réussi à mettre fin à une série de défaites contre leurs voisins. Ces deux matchs s'inscrivaient dans le programme de huit rencontres amicales disputées par la Jordanie depuis le mois de janvier, afin de se préparer pour le premier tour des qualifications pour la Coupe du monde de football de 1998. Huit rencontres qui se soldent par deux victoires contre Oman, trois nuls (2 contre la Syrie, un contre le Liban), et trois défaites (1 contre le Liban, 2 contre l'Irak). «*Notre équipe s'améliore de jour en jour*», se réjouit Hisham Lutfi Asfour, secrétaire général de la Fédération jordanienne de football. «*Nous espérons que nos efforts font payer et que cela se traduira par la qualification de notre équipe pour le deuxième tour des éliminatoires*».

La Jordanie semble en effet avoir particulièrement préparé cette première phase qu'elle entamera d'ici quelques jours aux Emirats Arabes Unis. C'est la première fois que l'équipe nationale dispose d'une telle préparation, avec plusieurs stages dans la région. Et jusqu'au dernier moment, les joueurs sont restés en camp d'entrainement à Aqaba pour s'habituer au climat du Golfe, aussi chaud que dans le Sud jordanien mais bien plus humide.

Dépendant de la zone Asie qui compte 36 pays répartis en dix poules, la Jordanie est opposée dans ce premier tour au Bahreïn et aux Emirats arabes unis. Elle disputera deux matchs contre chacune de ces équipes. «*Nous avons observé ces deux équipes et vu leurs matches en vidéo. Nous pensons que nous sommes du même niveau*» explique Hisham Lutfi Asfour. Un jugement partagé par l'entraîneur national Mohammad Awad qui rappelle que l'équipe jordanienne était revenue des Emirats arabes unis en 1993 avec une victoire et une défaite.

Si elle parvient à franchir ce premier tour, la Jordanie rencontrera ensuite des adversaires d'un tout autre niveau. Dix équipes divisée en deux groupes de 5 disputeront la suite des éliminatoires, avec seulement trois qualifiées pour la Coupe du monde.

Parmi ces qualifiées devraient figurer de grandes équipes telles que l'Arabie saoudite, l'Iran ou l'Irak, qui, malgré l'embargo et les nombreuses difficultés que connaît son équipe pour s'entrainer, reste un adversaire redoutable.

Pour la Jordanie, le plus important est bien sûr de franchir ce premier tour qu'elle n'avait pas passé lors de la précédente Coupe du monde, alors qu'elle était dans le groupe de l'Irak, de la Chine et du Pakistan.

Elle verra ensuite quelles peuvent être ses prétentions pour la Coupe du monde de1998. «*En football, tout est possible*» explique Mohammad Awad. «*Et nous espérons bien voir Paris l'année prochaine.*»■

Olivier Bras



Deux victoires, trois nuls et trois défaites: voilà le bilan de l'équipe jordanienne au terme de sa phase de préparation.

Quatre matchs en 2 semaines

A Bahreïn

Le 8/04: Emirats arabes unis - Jordanie
Le 14/04: Bahreïn - Jordanie

Aux Emirats arabes unis

Le 19-04: Bahreïn - Jordanie
Le 26/04: Emirats arabes unis - Jordanie

C'est la vie

L'agenda français d'Amman

Exposition

Patricia Châtelain, à partir du 6 avril au CCCL.

Cinéma

Cycle **Duos au masculin**
Le 7 avril à 20h30, **La grande vadrouille** (1966), de Gérard Oury. Avec Louis de Funès et Bourvil.

Economie

Des privatisations nécessaires

Pour moderniser son économie, la Jordanie doit procéder à une importante vague de privatisations qui lui permettront d'adopter un modèle économique plus performant.

Il était une fois un pays heureux où le roi conservait une grande popularité grâce à sa grande largesse. Il faisait de nombreux périples dans la région pour obtenir de l'aide économique de ses voisins et des subventions pour son peuple. Dans ce pays merveilleux, tout était bon marché: l'eau, l'électricité, le pain,...

Tout cela n'est qu'un conte de fée? Non. C'est en fait la petite histoire de la Jordanie entre 1975 et 1985. Au cours de cette époque bénie, la région était riche grâce au prix élevé du pétrole. Mais aujourd'hui, ce beau rêve est bel et bien terminé, et la Jordanie s'est réveillée en plein cauchemar.

Le royaume hachémite n'est plus depuis longtemps ce pays fortuné où le niveau de vie économique était élevé en dépit de moyens économiques limités. La belle époque de l'aide extérieure est terminée, mais la mentalité de beaucoup de dirigeants n'a pas changé. Beaucoup pensent toujours au soutien de l'étranger, et surtout ces jours-ci de l'Union européenne et du Japon.

Pour améliorer l'état actuel de l'économie, il est pourtant indispensable que l'on change les mentalités. Pour que la Jordanie ait une économie suffisamment riche et à l'aise, il faut trouver des solutions radicales à nos problèmes actuels. Selon un consensus mondial des économistes, y compris des experts jordaniens ou arabes, la privatisation de l'économie fait partie des mesures qui doivent permettre de sortir de l'impasse économique post-socialiste. Il ne faut en effet pas hésiter à décrire la Jordanie comme un état socialiste dans lequel l'Etat dirige directement ou indirectement les moyens de production.

Il est aujourd'hui nécessaire que le gouvernement abandonne ce rôle et laisse au secteur privé la possibilité de mieux gérer la vie économique. Et pour arriver à ce nouveau scénario, il est nécessaire de privatiser certains pans de l'économie jordanienne qui sont toujours la propriété de l'Etat.

Mais il faut se méfier : on ne peut pas tout vendre en 24 heures au secteur privé. Il faut d'abord prendre en considération les réalités de la Jordanie. Toute opération de privatisation doit être soigneusement étudiée.

L'opération de privatisation doit commencer avec des entreprises «faciles», avant de passer à des dossiers plus stratégiques comme l'électricité ou le téléphone. Heureusement, la Jordanie semble être engagée dans la bonne voie pour ces deux domaines. La compagnie jordanienne d'électricité est maintenant une société commerciale, détenue pour le moment encore à 100% par l'Etat. Mais la Nepco, selon son nouveau nom, sera gérée sur des bases commerciales avant d'être privatisée dans un avenir proche, en 1998 ou 1999.

Et en ce qui concerne les télécommunications, l'ancien JCC étatique est aussi en passe de devenir une société commerciale, ses dirigeants recherchant actuellement un partenaire stratégique pour l'achat de 25% de ses actions.

Il est certain que de nombreuses difficultés surgiront dans cette opération de privatisations, et que celle de la Royal Jordanian n'est pas encore pour demain. Mais en progressant par petits pas, la Jordanie est sur le bon chemin, à savoir l'abandon du socialisme et l'adoption de nouvelles mesures telles que les privatisations.■

Riad al Khouri
MEBA S.A.R.L.



Le nouveau gouvernement jordanien de M.Majali devra procéder à une importante vague de privatisations.

Communiqué

Christiane Kammermann et Khalil Hadife, délégués au Conseil supérieur des Français de l'étranger (Liban, Jordanie, Syrie), en résidence à Beyrouth, seront en **Jordanie les 8 et 9 avril.**

A cette occasion, un bureau sera mis à la disposition de Mme Kammermann pour qu'elle puisse y recevoir tout(e) ressortissant(e) français(e) désirant s'entretenir avec elle de questions ou problèmes précis, **le mercredi 9 avril, entre 16h30 et 18h30.** Les personnes souhaitant la rencontrer sont priées de prendre rendez-vous par l'intermédiaire de Mme Laval, chargée de la communauté française au sein de la section consulaire.

هكذا من الأصل

Activities

Royal Cultural Centre	661026/7	Concord Cinema	677420
American Centre Library	820101	Plaza Cinema	699238
British Council	636147/8	Philadelphia Cinema	634144
French Cultural Centre	637009		
Goethe Institute	641993	**Sports Clubs**	
Cervantes Institute (Spanish)	610858	Al Hussein Sports City	667181/5
Turkish Cultural Centre	639777	Orthodox Club	810491
Haya Arts Centre	665195	Royal Automobile Club	815410
Y.W.C.A.	641793	Royal Shooting Club	736572
Y.W.M.A.	664251	Royal Chess Club	673713
Darat al Funun	643252	Royal Racing Club	09-801233
Alia Art Gallery	639303	Jordan Bridge Club	676990
Baladna Art Gallery	657132	Amman Mun. Library	636111
Nabil Al Mashini Theatre	675571	Univ. of Jordan Library	843555
Nabil & Hisham's Theatre	625155	R.S.C.N.	837931/837937



Government Depts.

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THE STAR'S WORK STATION
COMPUTING & HIGH TECH
Edited by Zeid Nasser

Computer & IT companies !:

Welcome to *The Star's* Workstation, the absolute source on what's hot and what's not in Jordan's IT market. Fax us on 648298 or email us at Star@NETS.com.Jo with your news and views.

An analytical look at international telecoms:

A global village, indeed!

By Jawad Abbassi
Special to The Star

THE SIGNS are abundant and clear that distances no longer matter; the advancement in telecommunications and its decreasing costs make the business associate in California as readily "reachable" as the colleague in the office next door.

The "global village"— the catchword used over and over by the media—is evident to many who make use of its different manifestations like the cellular, the Internet, the fax and satellite dishes. However many others still dismiss the notion of the "global village" as an inflated media hype formulated by journalists eager to have catchy headlines.

With this in mind, the World Telecommunications Development Report, published this year by The International Telecommunications Union, comes as a vindication to the media and its catchy "global village" paradigm.

The report, whose theme this year revolved around "trade in Telecommunications," substantiates the stories on the massive growth and advancements in the telecommunications sector on a global scale. This important sector already ranks third in terms of market capitalization after health care and banking. Furthermore, and while its importance as a traded service is paramount, the telecommunications sector plays a pivotal role in education, trade, dissemination of knowledge and transfer of technology and has therefore become as an important resource as capital and labor.

All in all, the telecommunication sector worldwide



achieved revenues amounting to $788 billion in 1995 with an annual increase of about seven percent, double the annual global growth in GDP of 3.5%, which means that telecommunications is increasing its share of GDPs and hence its relative importance.

Another important indicator is the total number of international phone call minutes conducted: In 1975 these amounted to 4 billion minutes which rose by an annual 15 percent to reach 60 billion minutes by 1995 generating more than $53 billion in retail revenues. Trade in telecommunications services and equipment is estimated to have exceeded $100 billion in 1996.

Trade in telecommunications equipment alone, driven by more demand and construction of new networks of telecommunications of the fixed or mobile variety, is increasing at 20 percent a year and has reached $58 billion in 1995.

While trade in equipment has always been high, new liberalization of telecommunications markets and breaking down of monopolies is spurring trade in telecommunications services revolving around cross border supply, commercial presence, movement of staff and consumption abroad. One major reason for this boom in service trade is the privatization of many state owned monopolies around the world as well as the spectacular growth in licensing mobile telecommunications operators by many developing countries.

Statistics on Telecoms (source ITU)

Annual change by value in real terms

	Telecom Services	GDP
1992	5%	2%
1993	5%	2%
1994	6%	3%
1995	7%	3.5%

As usual, the Internet witnessed the most spectacular growth as it still doubles in the number of users every year. At the beginning of this year, the Internet was estimated at having more than 16 million Internet host computers serving more than 50 million users.

The trade in "infocommunications"—the converging telecommunications and information technology sectors—reached an astounding $1370 billion in 1995.

One of the Internet's important uses is its facilitation of trade where estimates of the value of transactions carried over it in 1996 reached $3 billion. Many analysts believe that this is just the beginning of an age where the Internet will lay down the foundations for a "global information infrastructure" for commerce and communication.

The report's clear description of how we the world has indeed become a "global village" should be enough for the remaining skeptics to repent, believe and accept.

These "Thomases" needed to read a report to believe. Blessed are those who believed without reading! ■

email: Abbassi@NETS.com.Jo

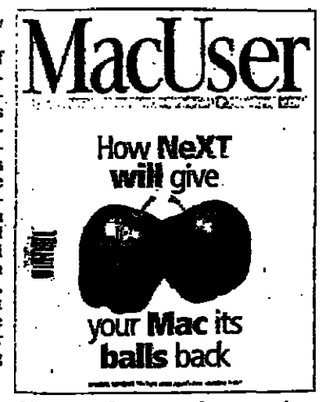
Apple 'squeezes' itself for a chance

IT'S BEEN at the top of the news for around two years now. Apple Computer is going through really tough times. Analysts have been discussing the many, varied reasons behind Apple's current state for a long time but at the end of the day, it boils down to one thing: The lack of vision as to the realities of the international computer and IT markets, and overconfidence in the supposed superiority of Apple products.

The result is a shrinking Apple Macintosh share every year—which hit a low of seven percent of the personal computer market last year—and a debt-ridden company that is letting go of 4,100 employees. Apple will subject itself to a strict 'commercial restructure' by which cost-cutting will play a central role in putting the company back on track. Amidst this financial mess, Apple is also trying to implement strategies and alliances that keep the company technologically ahead.

In the past couple of months, Apple purchased NeXT computers, to utilize the latter's advanced operating systems in future Macintosh models. It is expected that the advanced objects technology incorporated in NeXT software and operating systems will keep Apple on par with Microsoft. There are, however, rumors that Apple is about to be purchased by a number of companies, including Oracle, but nothing is official.

What does all this mean to Apple Macintosh users? Well, there is a relatively large base of Apple Mac users worldwide, and Mac events are a testament to the huge following the Mac enjoys. Apple's problems aside, the Mac will go strong for a while, but Apple has to play its role in developing the Mac for the future. For everyone's sake, let's hope Apple gets its act together. ■



Mac User humorously portraying Apple's acquisition of NeXT

News update

AutoDesk opens office in the region

● There's good news for AutoCAD users in Jordan and the Middle East. AutoDesk, the company that publishes AutoCAD, is opening a regional office in Dubai, in order to serve and support its registered users in the region.

For many years, AutoCAD users in the Middle East have had to put up with the lack of software support. This has proven to be a serious problem, especially for organizations that utilize AutoCAD and AutoDesk products for mission critical applications.

This is all set to change. For now, AutoDesk has yet to inaugurate its headquarters and announce contact numbers. We will keep you posted on developments.

The 'Year 2000' problem continues

● More organizations worldwide are beginning to discover the huge costs involved in tackling the 'Year 2000' problem.

Basically, due to the fact that computer dating systems have been built around a two digit system (by which 1989 is '89,' for example), the year 2000 poses a serious problem because it will be perceived by computers as two zeros. Accordingly, all sorts of software havoc could result.

Companies are gearing up to solve this problem. One solution is to re-write certain lines of code, but even that is very costly.

Apparently, Saudi Aramco, the huge oil company, has estimated the cost of re-writing its code at millions of dollars! For now, companies all over the world are scrambling to solve the problem, while the clock keeps ticking.

US Robotics merges with 3 Com

● As part of the direction towards merging forces in the international information technology industry, US Robotics and 3 Com announced their merger under the 3 Com name; creating a company of $5 billion in annual revenue.

The merger is logical as US Robotics is a leader in modems and communications accessories, while 3 Com is a networking specialist. The world's of communications and networking converge today more than ever. The new company includes over 12,000 employees in 130 countries.

INTERFACE
BY ZEID NASSER

CD future looks bright

SOMETIMES, WE take some aspects of computing for granted. For some of us, who have been computer users since the early eighties, full motion video coupled with clear sound tracks was an amazing development that the CD-ROM introduced to our previously straightforward computing lives.

Today, a whole generation of computer users find it perfectly normal to watch a film on CD-ROM, or receive complete educational courses through interactive speech and graphics. This change has been fueled by the fast paced developments in CD-ROM technology, which over the past three years have resulted in access speeds to double every six months. Most recently introduced are the eight times the speed (8x) and 10 times the speed (10x) CD-ROM drives. The 8x drives offer 1,200 Kbps data transfer rates which means that you will receive improved 'seek-time' performance (the time it takes to seek bits of information on a CD and deliver them to the user). Also, you can expect smoother playback of video clips.

However, till this day, the performance and capabilities of CD-ROM drives are somewhat restricted by the standard 640 MB memory restriction on compact disks. This is where a new technology, known as DVD, is stepping in to deliver a minimum storage capacity of 4.7 gigabytes.

8x CD-ROM drives are available on the Jordanian market, and come as part of full multimedia kits (sound card and speakers) for a total of about JD 200. If you purchase a PC with a CD-ROM built in, the chances are that it's an 8x drive, as most vendors are dropping the 6x drives that used to be the standard until the end of last year.

For now, it's worth watching and waiting to see where CD-ROM technology will go next, but it is a fact of life in computing today that a PC is 'bare' without a CD-ROM drive. You can count on the fact that most PC buyers, whether in the home or business sectors, require a CD-ROM as standard in their PCs.

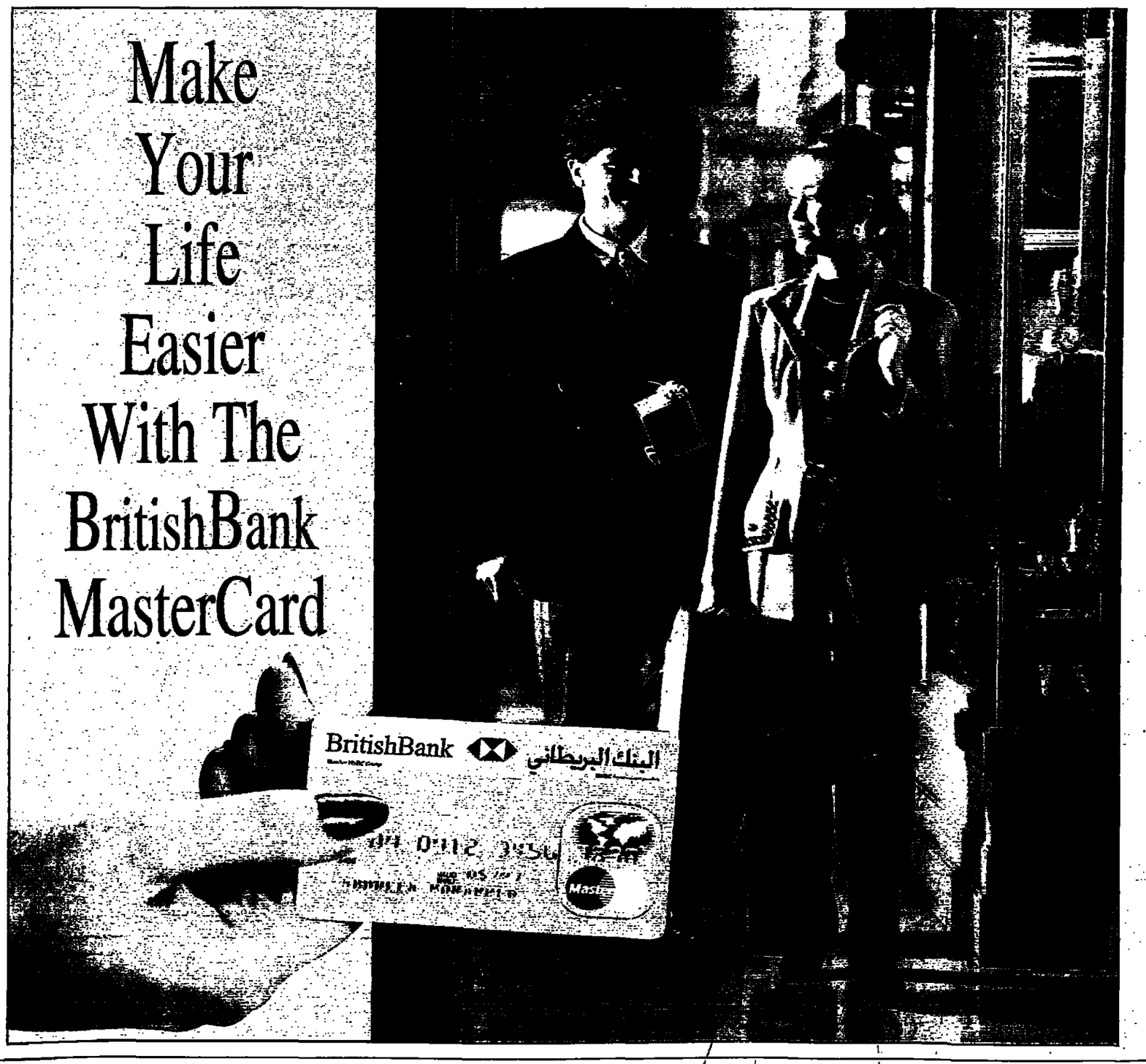
One thing we hope for is to see writable CD technology getting cheaper, to enable us all to store hundreds of megabytes per CD, keeping all our libraries of software on a couple of disks. Now that would be something! ■

Growth in our software exports

The software development industry in Jordan is growing with much promise, for this sector is becoming a promising export industry for the country.

In addition to the already well-known software houses, there is a new emerging breed of software development houses which have their eyes set on the Middle Eastern market. Among the most prominent are Turath Center for Computer Research, who are working on a number of Islamic software packages which will be available on CD-ROM; MicroSoftware House who already have several applications in the medical field that cater to the needs of doctors, dentists and general medical education. These two software publishers are beginning to gain exposure region-wide, through marketing and advertising their products aggressively to consumers in the Arabian Gulf countries. Other emerging 'software houses' include Smart Solutions who have introduced an accounting package called Afaq (Horizons). Also, in the final stages before launching, a software house called Al-Bayraq will soon be introducing a variety of multimedia educational software packages.

All these people, whether well-established or still working hard to make their presence felt, deserve all sorts of support possible, to allow software development to turn into a true export industry for Jordan. Here, we have to salute efforts made by the Jordan Exports Development and Commercial Centers Corp. (JEDCO) and we encourage more action, as part of an integrated and comprehensive annual plan. ■



هكذا من الأصل